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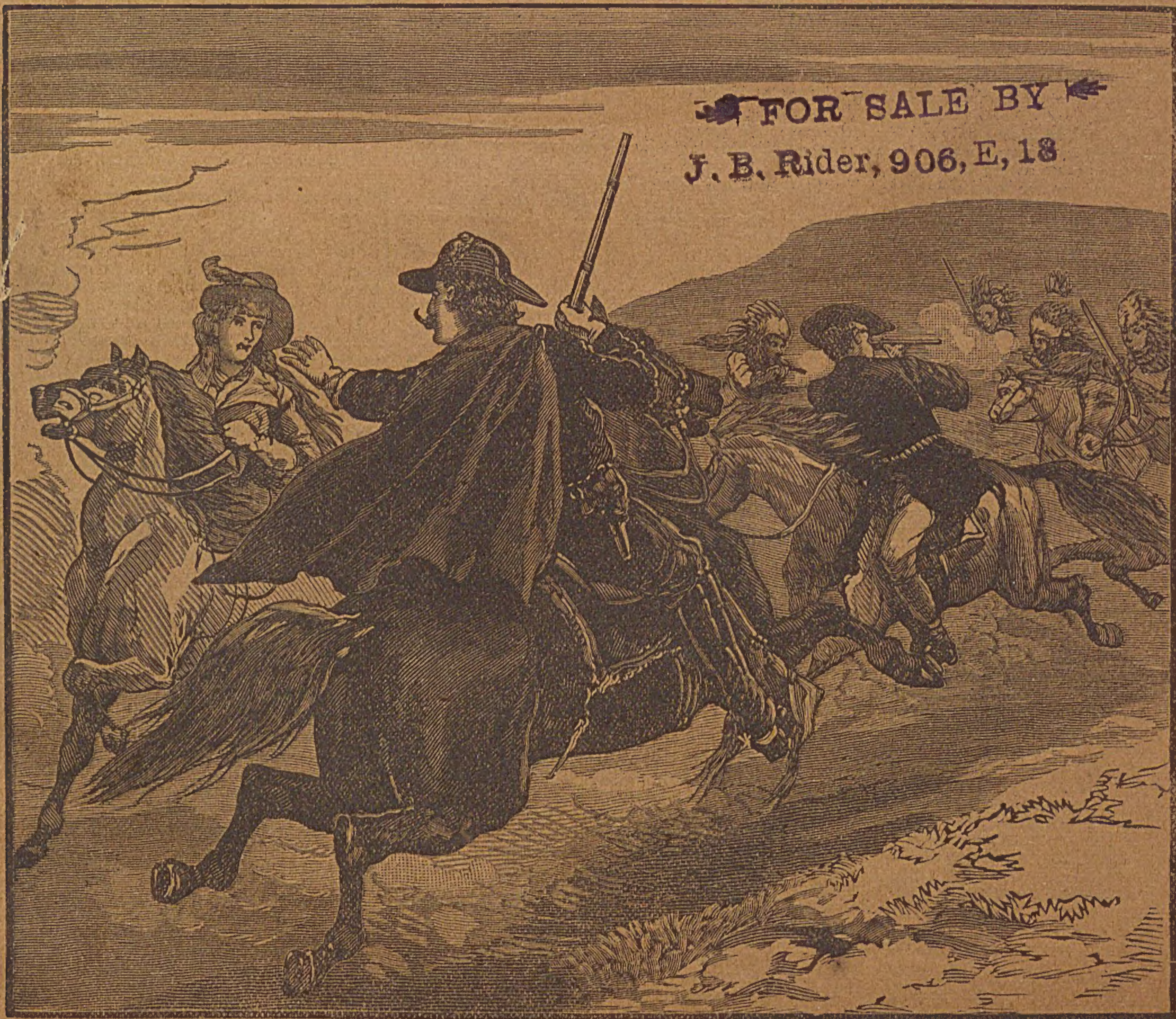
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DANDY DAN OF DEADWOOD BETRAYED; OR, The Vultures of Montana. By "NONAME."

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Dandy Dan of Deadwood Betrayed;

OR, THE VULTURES OF MONTANA.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Dandy Dan of Deadwood and His Big Bonanza," "Dandy Dan of Deadwood and His Deal with Death," etc.

CHAPTER I.

HORSE AND RIDER.

It was evening.

Not yet night, but that bewitching hour on the plains when the sun has set and the stars first begin to open their bright little eyes in the heavens.

It is not yet dark, and only the boldest stars in the far off east have dared to peep on the earth after the departing day. No hour is more lonely or impressive than the twilight on the vast prairie, and tired as he was the solitary horseman whom we introduce in this story was evidently impressed with the solemnity of the scene.

With the going down of the sun there was a great hush of Nature. A kind of a pause between the noises of day and the sounds of night. The lonesome howl of the coyote has not yet broken on the startled air.

But we must introduce the horse and rider to the reader. Horsemen in general are not uncommon on the plains, but this horseman is rather peculiar.

He sits his steed as if he were a part of the animal, and surely no Centaur was ever more graceful or daring. He wears a large, broad-brimmed hat of the finest make, one side of the brim gathered up by a cluster of diamonds, and his coat is of dark velvet, with buttons, each of which sparkles with the setting of a precious stone. His trousers are of velvet, with a string of golden braid along each seam. His boots of the finest patent leather, though like his garments dust covered and travel stained.

About his waist is a fine morocco belt, supporting a brace of six-shooters and a double-edged dagger. His hair, long, black as night and inclined to curl into ringlets, was soft as silk, and his eyes were jetty blackness.

There was a bold manliness about the rider which would fill one with admiration at sight. His eye was bold, his face open and frank, denoting bravery and that which is the twin brother of bravery, unselfishness and honesty. Should one travel the wide world over for a model hero, they could not find a better than our horseman.

In addition to the weapons already mentioned, there swung in a leather case at his saddle bow, a short Winchester rifle, one of those powerful repeating arms known as saddle guns.

Now as to his horse.

That horse was as well calculated to strike the beholder with admiration as the master.

In fact, one to see them would say at once they should be inseparable.

The horse was jet black, with hair glossy and fine as silk, telling of the rich blood of a thoroughbred steed. His eye flashed with fire and his lofty step and carriage denoted that his long day's travel had not subdued his lofty spirit.

We fancy the reader has already guessed who this horse and rider are. Had he been familiar with certain parts of the frontier a few years ago he would exclaim at once:

"Dandy Dan of Deadwood and Meteor."

The reader would have been correct in his guess, for the horse and rider we have introduced are Dandy Dan of Deadwood and that wonderful horse Meteor.

Meteor never had an equal in speed and endurance. On his swiftness Dandy Dan of Deadwood owed his life a score of times. No money could purchase that horse.

Once a great railroad king, who had a weakness for the turf, having heard so much of the flying Meteor of the far West, took a special trip to Deadwood to find Dandy Dan and procure his wonderful horse.

He first began his negotiations by the wild offer of fifteen thousand dollars, at which Dandy Dan laughed. He doubled the sum. Dan still smiled. He made it fifty thousand and one hundred thousand when Dandy Dan interrupted him with:

"How many railroads do you own?"

"I have a controlling interest in three," was the answer.

"Well, sir, if you owned every railroad and every telegraph system in the world, and should offer them all to me for this horse, you could not buy him. He is not for sale, and never will be."

The railroad king was very much disappointed and surprised. He left Dandy Dan, declaring he believed he loved his horse.

Dan did love his horse, and he had cause to. The intelligent animal always displayed an affection for him that was remarkable.

Having introduced the horse and rider, the reader may be somewhat interested in the course they are going and the country they are traveling through. They are in the eastern part of Montana; their course is westward.

The country about them is almost level. They have just crossed a long stretch of prairie and entered a grove of low oaks, which extends for miles, to the banks of a river, and beyond begins the foot hills and offshoots of the mountains, which conceal many treasures in the form of rich deposits of gold and silver.

Dandy Dan gazed at the scene about him, and, as he frequently did when 'there was no one else near, expressed his ideas to his horse.

"Well, Meteor, old boy, we stand an excellent chance of passing one more night in open air, unless I greatly mistake."

The horse, at sound of his master's voice breaking a prolonged silence, shook his head and gave utterance to a low neigh.

"Noble Meteor, you have done well to-day, and I will not ride you too hard. Unless I mistake there is a small stream a short distance ahead and we will halt there for the night."

The trees grew denser and larger as they advanced until by the time the brook was reached they were in quite a forest. In places, however, where the shade was not so great as to prevent the growth of grass, there was an abundance of food for the horse.

Dandy Dan of Deadwood after carefully reconnoitering the woods, dismounted and removed the gun and large Mexican saddle. He then took a cloth which he carried with him for the purpose, and rubbed the back of his horse where the saddle had been, until the hair was quite dry to prevent saddle galls. Then he led his horse to the brook and master and steed both drank at the same time.

Meteor was turned out to feed on the grass without being hobbled or picketed, for Dandy Dan of Deadwood knew he would not stray far from him.

Then Dan, who carried a small camping outfit in his saddle pockets made a fire, warmed some jerked buffalo steaks and in a tin cup made his coffee, so that in a few moments, he had quite a respectable supper for a plainsman. In his vest pocket he carried some cigars and after supper he drew one forth and proceeded to smoke.

It was now quite dark, night having fairly set in. There was no moon and only the pale, lambent glow of the far away stars to shed light upon the earth. Dan had about half finished his cigar when he suddenly rose, poked the fire and laid on a dry stick. It crackled and the bright flames shot upward, throwing out a bright red glow of light. Taking from an inside pocket of his coat a packet which was so cunningly constructed that it would be difficult for one who did not suspect its presence to find it, a letter. Dan unfolded it and proceeded to read its contents.

It was not a new letter.

Dan had read it before a dozen times, but he seemed very anxious to familiarize himself with every detail of it.

"Here is a new venture," he thought, "and

in which all others grow tame. Well, I have tried my hand at road agents, Indians, horse-thieves, Mexican bandits and almost every other class of criminals known to the world, but here is something new, more cunning, more mischievous and perhaps far more dangerous than anything with which I have yet met. Well, Dandy Dan of Deadwood, you will have to keep your wits about you to sustain your life and your former reputation."

He returned the letter to its hiding-place and then finished his cigar. For a long time he sat leaning against a tree, gazing into the smoldering fire.

Taking out an elegant gold watch he looked at the face of it, and said:

"Ten o'clock—bed time. Come, Meteor, haven't you finished your supper?"

His well-trained horse at sound of his master's voice came to him with a whinny and took up his position near his master.

Dandy Dan of Deadwood spread a blanket on the ground between two young trees, another grew at the foot of his bed. He placed his saddle at the head for a pillow and set his Winchester rifle against a tree at his head, on his right.

Unhooking his belt, he hung it upon the bush at the left side of his head, so that he had but to lay out his hands and seize all his weapons at the same moment.

He unfastened his coat and vest, merely loosening them, but not taking them off, and lay down upon his bed; Meteor standing near, browsing on the buds and leaves of the bushes.

All was still and quiet. Only the crickets and night birds and the champing of Meteor broke the silence, forming delightful music for the tired traveler to sleep by. Dan's mind was busy. He had much to think about, and could not go to sleep immediately. This new mission, this journey to adventures new and dangers strange, engrossed all his thoughts.

Frequently he muttered:

"The Vultures of Montana! The Vultures of Montana!"

What did he mean by so mysterious a term? Wait, patient reader, and you will learn as our story unfolds itself. The words evidently meant something terrible, for Dandy Dan of Deadwood sometimes shuddered at the mere mention of them.

But at last overcome by fatigue his senses were slipping away. His eyes had closed when a night fly alighted on his nose. He brushed it away and was again falling into the arms of Morpheus, when his horse gave utterance to a snort.

In a second Dan was wide awake and sitting up.

How did he rise so quickly? Had the reader been near him he would not have seen him, for his motion was too quick for the eye to follow it.

He had his rifle in one hand and his revolvers in the other.

"Quiet, Meteor!" he whispered.

The horse understood him and became quiet.

"Down—down, Meteor—down!"

Then the noble, well-trained animal crouched down to the ground at his feet, and lay as motionless as if he had been carved out of stone.

Dandy Dan of Deadwood listened.

An ordinary ear would have heard nothing, but his keen senses did. He stepped out from his bed and buttoned his coat and vest, and running his left arm through his belt, took down his hat which had hung on a bush, and placed it on his head.

"We will not saddle yet, Meteor, they are too far away," said Dan.

He quitted his camping place and went out into the road, and stooping down, placed his ear close to the ground. No one save a person trained all his life to the frontier could have made out anything. But as we have previously stated, Dandy Dan of Deadwood was possessed of remarkably acute senses. He had listened but a few seconds when he started to his feet.

"There is but one!" he said, in a tone of

indifference, as though the matter was so trifling as to hardly justify his repose being disturbed.

He waited for a few moments, and again bent his ear and listened.

"A greaser, too!"

Walking carelessly back to his camp, he hung up the belt containing his revolvers and knife, and patting his horse, said in a low tone:

"It's only a greaser, Meteor, my good fellow, but you can scent them a mile off, can't you, old fellow? Lie still, my noble Meteor, and I will look after our visitor," and then with no weapon save his rifle he went out in the road to meet the new-comer.

The short, jerky tread of a mustang, and the jingling of spurs and rattling of a machete, could now be heard by any one, and although no one had been seen, any one would have known that a Mexican was approaching. Mexicans in Montana are sometimes dangerous, but, as a rule, the American has no more fear of him than of the Chinaman.

As motionless as the tree at his side, Dandy Dan of Deadwood awaited the arrival of his visitor. At last he came into view, and cantered leisurely along until within twenty steps, when Dan cried:

"Halt!"

The Mexican stopped.

"Where are you going?"

"To Paradise," was the answer.

Paradise was the name of a mining town in Montana.

"You don't expect to get there to-night?"

"No, sir. I am only going to the first place to camp. I was going to stop at that brook where you are."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood was struck by the excellent English used by the Mexican. There was scarcely a taint of foreign accent in his words.

"I am camped there."

"Well, if you have no objection, I will camp with you. I have come a long way, and my pony and I are both very tired."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood was taking in the man before him. The Mexican was a large man. His horse was much larger than the average Mexican pony. The rider was armed with pistols, a double-barreled rifle, and a machete.

In addition, he carried the lasso coiled up at the horn of his saddle, which may also be considered as a weapon, for it is often used as such. Dandy Dan hesitated about taking in such a companion, but he reasoned that it would be much better to have him in his own camp than camping within a mile or so from him and having him slipping in to assassinate him while he slept.

"I don't know but that you might camp with me if you will promise to be civil," said Dan.

"I will promise."

"Come in, then."

Dan pointed to his camp and waited for the new-comer to ride up and dismount, while he waited with rifle in his hand.

"What is your name?" he asked of the Mexican.

"Miguel Le Noir."

Dan was puzzled at the name.

"How does it come that your name is part Spanish and part French," he asked.

Le Noir said:

"I am part Spanish and part French. My mother was Spanish, my father French."

He was very dark and there was something cunning and forbidding in his appearance.

Dandy Dan did not like the man at first sight.

Truly, if ever I saw a despicable, cunning villain, it is he," Dan thought. "But I will keep an eye on him."

Walking to his revolvers, he took them up and buckled the belt about his waist.

"You had gone to sleep?" said Le Noir.

"Yes."

"And awoke?"

"Yes—I was hardly asleep. I never sleep very sound."

Dan threw on some dry sticks and they blazed up, throwing out a broad glare, by

which he studied the face of Le Noir. There was nothing enticing in that face.

Not that he was positively ugly, but his features were so strongly expressive of cunning and treachery as to be repulsive.

"Have you come far?" Dan asked.

"Yes."

"From what point?"

"Plain City."

"Plain City—I left there this morning."

"You did?"

The French-Spaniard started and fixed his great eyes eagerly on Dan, as though he had just made a very pleasing discovery.

"Yes," Dan answered.

"How soon?"

"At dawn."

The new-comer became silent and sat gazing into the fire. At last he said:

"You don't sleep sound?"

"No."

"Don't you think one of us had better remain awake on guard?"

"Why?" Dan asked. "The chances are that not another person will pass over this road for a month, and there is not an Indian within miles."

The new-comer was about to make some answer when again Dandy Dan's horse gave utterance to a warning snort and started to his feet.

At the same moment there came to their ears a crashing of underbrush and a voice with a strong mountain vernacular, could be heard, exclaiming:

"Chaw me up fer buffler meat, rub me out and roll me over Pike's Peak, if this 'ere don't knock ther rocks off'n any special nick o' ther woods ever I sot my pedal extremities on in all my born existence."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood had on his belt with his revolvers, had saddled and bridled Meteor, and cocked his gun ere the voice had ceased speaking.

Then he glanced at Le Noir and saw that he had also saddled and bridled his horse.

CHAPTER II.

SAVED BY A MIRACLE.

THERE was a look of defiant pride on the face of Le Noir when he had made an exhibition of skill in saddling equal to Dandy Dan.

But neither of them had any time to consider their own prowess. The approach of footsteps attracted all their attention.

The footfalls were not heavy, but loud enough to raise the attention of such a born frontiersman as Dandy Dan of Deadwood. The new-comer was evidently communing with himself.

"Jake, I'm ashamed o' ye, hanged if I ain't. Whar's all yer boasted knowledge o' ther world? Yer've traveled all over ther hull sarcumnavigable globe, from the Isthmus-o' Gibraltar ter the Rock o' Darien, an' now yer git lost. Ef this don't knock ther socks off'n my understandin', nothin' else in crimony kingdom come ever did."

"Halt!" cried Dan.

"Wot?"

"Halt, I say! I suppose you understand what that means?"

"Bet I do, pilgrim, but whar be yer? Air I blind or hev I turned ter a tater-bug, with eyes on each side, an' can't see afore my face?"

"Who are you?"

"Wall, pilgrim, ef yer want ter know ther hull of my cosmography from beginnin' ter ther end, from Alpha ter Omega, I'll state I war born et er very early period of my existence—"

"I don't care when or where you were born," said Dan, cocking his gun, for he did not like the evasive manner of the new-comer.

"Wall, pilgrim, ef ye'll only be so perlite ez ter enlighten my mind on wot yer do want, I'll try ter gratify yer appertite ef it pulverizes my consterloooshon ter do it!"

"What is your name?"

"Wall, now yer got me, pilgrim. Which

one o' my names d'yer want, fer every time I go ter a new locality they change it fer me."

"The name under which you registered in the last jail?" said Dan.

"Wall, yer er cool 'un, ain't yer? Ef yer want my present handle, I am Grizzly Jake, ther Maverick er Mustang, pilgrim, wot never war branded—er hoss wot never war saddled, an' I buck most all-firedly when it comes ter sich sharp dudes ez yer."

"Advance, I want to see how innocent you look," said Dan. "I'll warrant your photograph is in the rogues gallery."

"Wall, pilgrim, I ain't ershamed ter show myself."

Grizzly Jake came forward into the circle of firelight. Dan whispered a word to Le Noir at his side, and stepping backward threw on some dry sticks with his left hand, keeping his gun cocked in his right.

The fire blazed up, throwing out a great generous blaze of light which fell on the features of the new-comer.

"Wall, hyar I air, pilgrim, all o' me, horns, buffs, hlide an' tail, now tell me wot yer think o' this kind uv er annermil anyway."

He was a tall man, about fifty years of age, dressed in hunter's costume with the yoonskin cap on his head.

He carried a powder horn and bullet pouch about his neck, and a long barreled rifle in his hand. His hair and beard were long and grizzled with time. His face was flushed and his eyes sparkled, evidently from the effects of whisky.

"Ya-as, pilgrim, I air hyar with ther hull family. Hyar's old Sweetlove," tapping his rifle, "one o' ther best o' ther kind. Never barks 'thout she bites, and these air her pups," and he touched the revolvers at his belt.

"Where have you been, Grizzly Jake?"

"Everywhar."

"Where are you going?"

"Nowhar."

"What have you been doing?"

"Punishin' pizen whisky, pilgrim, an' 'thout bein' egertistickle, I want ter remark thet I kin git erway with more tanglefoot an' walk straight under it than any other man in ther Rockies."

"I have no occasion to doubt your very frank assertion."

"Wall, pilgrim, I reckon et ain't good fer any 'un ter say old Grizzly Jake lies erbout anything. Did yer ever hear ther tocsins o' terror sound or ther bell o' doom ring? Why, I'm er regular walkin' alrthquake when I'm in licker. I've jumped ther Rockies, I've slid over ther plains on my ear, I've swum ther Mississippi, I eat cook-stoves, drink ackerfortis an' pick my teeth wi' ther butt cut o' a shellbark hickory when I git rantankerous."

"Hold on, my friend, you seem to be specially given to blowing your own horn."

"Then I kinder reckon et air sure o' bein' blowed. I kin knock ther socks offin anything 'at walks."

"I have no desire to test your skill in depriving people of their hose," said Dan.

"Certainly, I don't want to lose mine, but stick to your text."

"I ain't got none. D'yer think this air er sermon?"

"Why did you come here?"

"Wall, now yer want ter know ther object o' this 'ere rather unwelcome visit, I opine, pilgrim. Lem me tell yer I don't know. I left camp with er bottle o' tanglefoot, an' I guess I got too much, I don't know. Et air er fact, pilgrim. I've been in ther habit o' takin' too muck tanglefoot ever since I come ter these 'ere parts, which air er long time. Come hyar in '65, an' I've been hyar ever since '65."

At this moment some one touched Dandy Dan's arm, and looking about, he saw Le Noir, who stood behind a tree.

"Don't you know him?" Le Noir asked.

"No."

"Never saw him?"

"Never."

"Nor heard of him?"

Dan answered in the negative.

"Get rid of him as soon as possible," Le Noir whispered.

"Why?"

"He is a bad man."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes."

"See hyar!" called out old Grizzly Jake, "wot air all thet air whisperin' an' connivin' erbout?"

"You had better go away," said Dan.

"Say, pilgrim, who yer got thar behind thet air tree?"

"We don't want you about here, Grizzly Jake. I've heard of you."

"Yer hev! An' wot hev yer heard on me? Who hev hed ther owdasserty ter merlign an' slander, calumnize Grizzly Jake, I'd like ter know—tell me?"

"You are a bad man!"

"Course I am, when in licker, ur when I'm riled. I'm er holy walkin' terror. Grizzly b'ars git out o' ther road when I'm comin', an' painters run an' hide. But who hev yer got thar?"

Though Grizzly Jake was rather tipsy, he had not completely lost his wits, and pressing forward, he again asked:

"Who air thet man afraid to show his face ter old Grizzly Jake? Come out thar from behind ther tree like a man and lem me see who you air."

But Le Noir kept behind the tree and in an undertone said:

"Watch him and I'll keep an eye on the horses; there may be more."

Turning his back about, Le Noir took two or three steps toward the camp. The old man calling himself Grizzly Jake advanced a step.

"Hold! You are near enough!" cried Dan.

His rifle came to his shoulder and the muzzle was aimed directly at the center of the rude mountaineer's forehead.

The baffled man came to a standstill and gave utterance to an expression of rage which was half grunt and half yell.

"Advance another step, sir, and I will put a heavier brick in your head than you already have!"

The mountaineer was somewhat sobered by this sudden menace with death, and for a moment stood rubbing his head as if trying to gather together his scattered wits and extricate himself from his dilemma.

"Say, pilgrim, ye ain't been in this 'ere country very long, hev yer?"

"Long enough not to let you come a step nearer. Go back to your confederates."

"My confederates! why Lor' bless'yer, tenderfoot, I ain't got none."

"Your object here was doubtless to steal horses. If such was your thought and you fired yourself up with courage by drinking whisky you overdid the thing. Now go—go, or I'll put a bullet through you."

The mountaineer turned almost white, and turning to go, said:

"Yes, pilgrim, I'll go, but lem me giv yer er bit o' advice, wotch thet air varmint who's with yer. Don't yer trust him, he's er snake in ther grass."

Le Noir at this came boldly forward, and cried:

"Don't think I don't know you, Black Gabriel. Go or we'll riddle you with bullets. Go back to your band and tell them you failed. You were too drunk to be discreet."

"Watch 'im, pilgrim, he's er sneak."

"Go, before I count five, or I will fire!" cried Dandy Dan of Deadwood.

Then he began:

"One—"

"Two—"

"I'm gone."

Whatever may have been the condition of the mountaineer he wheeled quickly about, and retreated as if he realized the danger of that Winchester.

When he was gone, Le Noir said:

"It was a narrow escape."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes."

"Is he Black Gabriel?"

"He is."

"Who is Black Gabriel?"

"A cruel bandit or road agent, who robs stage coaches and seizes people and holds them for a ransom. He punishes them very cruelly, sometimes burns their feet or hands, so as to make them cripples for life."

"Had I known he was that desperate personage I should have killed or captured him."

"We won't be safe hardly to-night, we had better change our hiding-place."

"Our camp?"

"Yes. He may come here. In fact, there is no doubt but that he will go and summo his men and attack us."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood had heard of Black Gabriel, the Montana Vulture, as he was called, but he had not expected to see such a man as Grizzly Jake when he saw the chief of the band.

But, being a stranger in the country, and his companion thoroughly acquainted with it, it was only natural that Dan should trust to his judgment and skill to get them out of the scrape.

"You lead the way and I will follow," he said.

They saddled their horses and went down the stream a short distance.

The wood became denser and denser as they traveled, the trees larger and the ground more broken.

They crossed over the stream, and then entered a path which led still down the stream. The trees were so close together and their branches so thick that they met and interlocked over their heads so they were compelled to dismount and lead their horses.

Occasionally Le Noir came to a pause as if listening. Once he was seized with a violent fit of coughing, and coughed so long and so loud that Dandy Dan of Deadwood became alarmed for fear he would notify the man Black Gabriel where they were going.

"You have a cough," said Dan.

"Yes, very bad."

"Where are you going?"

"Not much further."

"Well, if you take another such a fit of coughing you will notify all the denizens of the forest of our presence."

"I am often so," said he. "I hope, though, I won't have it again."

"So do I."

They traveled on. Dan became a little suspicious and was on the point of declaring he would go no further when Le Noir was again seized with a fit of coughing which seemed to rack his frame terribly.

He coughed like a trumpet and the echoes were heard far over the forests.

"Desist, desist!" said Dan, or you will be heard all over the wood."

"I can't."

"You must."

"Impossible."

"Then we will part company."

As he was in the act of turning about there suddenly rose on every side of him, seeming to come right up out of the ground, dark forms of masked men, while the oily click of revolvers on every side was enough to make the blood run cold.

"Hold on, pilgrim, surrender or we will blow your heads off."

Dandy Dan at once knew they had run into a trap set for them.

Escape seemed utterly impossible. His horse scented the danger and began to rear and plunge.

"Hold up, pilgrim, don't yer try any o' yer games on us ur we'll make a first class sieve out o' yer carcass," cried the awful voice of a masked man, who was evidently leader of the gang.

Meteor leaped forward at his master's side, and Dandy Dan wound one arm tightly about the horn of his saddle. He resolved on a desperate plan, a plan he had never tried before, and one which if successful would seem almost like a miracle. It was no more nor less than to cling to the saddle and let his horse drag him along at its side through the woods out of danger.

"Hark away, Meteor!" he shouted.

Away bounded his horse through the forest at the top of his speed.

"Halt!"

"Halt!"

"Halt!"

Away they sped paying no heed to the commands to halt. The bushes scratched and beat andy Dan of Deadwood. He expected the shots long before they came, but so sudden and unexpected had been his movement that he was far out of any probable range when they fired the volley of bullets after him.

The plan was a new one, but it was successful and Dan, considering the danger from which he had escaped, could not but regard himself as being saved by a miracle. But he was not saved yet, for the enemy was in pursuit. He spoke again to Meteor and he increased his speed, dragging his master along at his side. The bushes and branches of trees and thorns lashed Dan cruelly, yet he cried:

"Faster, Meteor! faster still!"

CHAPTER III.

SOME STRANGE ADVENTURES—AT PARADISE.

At the end of half an hour, when Dandy Dan had been most unmercifully thumped against trees and bushes, his horse was brought to a standstill.

"It's all right for the present, Meteor," he whispered to his horse. "Let us take a little rest. I have been lacerated enough for the present; let us pause."

Dan had, fortunately, retained his weapons. His gun was at his saddle and his revolvers were in his belt.

"I have fared pretty well so far," he thought, on examining himself. "It is much better than I expected. I wonder how my friend came out?"

There was not yet more than a suspicion that Le Noir was a traitor to him.

He went to a log and sat down to rest and listen. Afar off, but at a great distance, could be heard the sounds of Dan's enemies.

"I've given them the slip for the present," he thought, "and I am in better shape now for flight or fight than when taken by surprise."

"Say, pilgrim!"

Dan bounded to his feet and seized a revolver.

"Who spoke?"

"Et war me, pilgrim. Put up that air weppin, I tell yer. I'm yer friend."

"What do you want?"

"Ef ye'll lem me I'll git yer out o' this 'ere condemned leetle diffikilty ef I hev ter knock ther socks off'n every pesky gerloot in ther woods."

"Who are you?"

"I am ther gentle bird yer driv erway from yer camp; but though ye treated me er leetle shabby I hev furgive yer. I follered yer 'cos I knowed yer war goin' inter trouble."

"You knew I was?"

"Yes."

"How did you know it?"

"Bercause yer started off in ther wrong company."

"Are you Black Gabriel?"

"No, pilgrim, ef I hed er been I'd er been with them fellers wot tried ter rub yer out. But come, we ain't got no time ter burn daylight lem me tell yer. Let's git ter hiffin' et, ur they'll be all erround us in no time, and then ye'll be tuk in. Will yer trust yerself to this 'ere lovin' bird without wings?"

"Yes—lead on."

The strange man led the way, and Dandy Dan, leading his horse, followed.

Almost noiselessly they glided through the wood for several hundred paces, passing down into a dark ravine.

Dan placed the rein over the horn of his saddle and took a revolver in each hand. The danger seemed to thicken, and he began to doubt his guide as he had suspected the other.

"Pilgrim, d'yer wait hyar," said the guide, when they reached the ravine. "I want ter go over ther hill an' see ef ther road air clear. We air in a tight place."

"Wait a moment," said Dan, taking a step

forward and placing the muzzle of a cocked revolver against the head of the guide.

"Are you going to betray me?"

Dandy Dan of Deadwood spoke in a low but very earnest tone. The cocked pistol said more than an hour's speech could have done.

"No, pilgrim, I'm yer friend."

"So said the other."

"Wall, I swear it."

"You may be Black Gabriel and you may not, but of one thing I want you to be assured and that is, I will kill you if you lead me into the hands of those men."

"When I do that you may kill me, pilgrim."

With this warning Dan permitted him to go. He stood at his horse's head, a cocked revolver in each hand and patiently awaited Jake's return.

In five minutes he came back and reported the way clear.

"Come!"

"Lead the way, Jake, but remember I am behind with twelve shots."

"Don't keer, pilgrim, ef yer got forty," Grizzly Jake answered. "I am goin' ter go straight. Whenever yer find me crooked then yer kin shute."

Through a part of the forest, so dense and so dark that they could not see an inch before them, Grizzly Jake led the way.

With the skill and care such as only an expert in woodcraft possesses, Jake parted the bushes with his hands and stole noiselessly through the wood. He seemed to be guided by instinct, for he led the way out of that labyrinthine forest into a valley between two ranges of hills.

"Now, pilgrim, yer free," said the old man, leaning on his rifle. "Yer kin go jist whar-ever yer please. Them fellers back there won't venture in ther valley."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood seized the old man's hand in both his own, and said:

"Forgive me, sir, for wronging you even in thought."

"Oh, that air all right, pilgrim. I don't want yer ter even menchun it; guess when I war full o' tanglefoot as yer found me, 'ppearances were agin me. But I'm goin' ter quit drink—I'm goin' ter make er strike some day and go home. I've got er wife and baby back in ther States wot I ain't seed fur sixteen years, pilgrim, but they'll be made happy yit. I'm goin' ter make er big strike an' go back ter 'em."

Dan looked at the old man and saw that his features had grown softer in proportion as he talked of his wife and child.

"I want to hear your history one day, Jake. Won't you come to Paradise where I can talk with you?"

"Don't dar go ter town, pilgrim, not thet I ever did any harm, or broke any law I'm er-fraid of, but I've got ther ravinest rip roar-in' rantankerous appetite fur lick'er yer ever seed in all yer life, an' I can't help it. Thar's a 'finity 'tween tanglefoot an' me, an' when we git nigh ter each other we air mighty apt ter come tergether. No; I'm goin' ter work now, strike it rich and go home."

"Do you know the man whom you found with me?" Dan asked.

"Yes."

"Who was he?"

"Black Gabriel."

"What?"

"Gospil truth, pilgrim."

"Why, he said you were Black Gabriel."

"He ain't ershamed to lie. He air half Spanish, half French, an' all demon. He war a leadin' yer ter his gang, an' all his coughin' and coughin' war ter tell his galoots yer war er comin', an' ter be ready."

"I see through it all now, Grizzly Jake, and I must thank you again. I hope to meet you some time. I may be able to help you go home."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood then sprang into the saddle, and galloped out in the valley. Here he found a tolerably well beaten road, which he followed until dawn of day.

Just as the sun began to climb over the eastern hills, throwing its light into the val-

ley, he was startled by the report of a gun on his right, and wheeling about saw a man and woman on horseback flying for life from half a dozen mounted Indians.

The man was not over twenty-one years of age, and a daring fellow. He shouted to the lady, or girl of seventeen:

"Ride on, Nannie, and I will cover your retreat."

The young lady was lashing her horse to the top of its speed. The young fellow, who had a double-barreled shotgun in his hand, fell back a little, and poured both barrels into the pursuers, evidently wounding one redskin.

But a shotgun don't hold up like a rifle. The Indians knew that, and were firing at long range.

Dandy Dan of Deadwood had taken in the scene at a glance, and was not a moment in deciding.

"It is time, Meteor," he said, "that you and I take part in this."

Meteor seemed to understand his master and gave vent to his wild battle neigh, as Dandy Dan of Deadwood wheeled him around, and unslinging his Winchester, charged on to the scene we have just described.

They soon met the flying girl, and Dan cried to her:

"Fear not, I will stop your pursuers!"

She gave him a grateful glance, and checking her horse, gazed back at her companion.

At this moment his horse had stumbled and fell, flinging the young fellow, who had been unable to reload his double-barreled gun, over his head.

Dandy Dan of Deadwood was by this time galloping up to him, but one of the Indians was on the fallen man and raised a big knife to strike him, when:

Crack! went Dan's rifle, and with a yell the savage's knife fell from his shattered hand.

Away ran the Indians as fast as they could scamper, but not until Dan had sent another shot after them, bringing down one.

"Woa, Meteor!"

Dan leaped from his horse and ran to the young fellow, who was stunned by the fall.

"Are any bones broken, friend?" asked Dan.

"No, sir. I believe not."

He was bleeding from a slight wound on the head. At this moment the young girl, who had halted her horse, came galloping back, crying:

"George, George, are you hurt?"

"Not bad, Nannie. I'll be all right in a moment. My horse, too, don't seem badly used up." Then turning to Dandy Dan of Deadwood he added:

"I thank you, sir. No doubt we owe our lives to you."

"Don't mention it," said Dan, with a smile. "I but did my duty. Where are you from?"

"Sticklersville."

"Where are you going?"

"To the village of Paradise."

"I am pleased to hear it."

"Are you bound in the same direction?"

"I am."

"Very well. We all will go together."

"With pleasure," Dan answered, "Are you able to ride again?"

"Oh, yes. Let me load my gun first. It's not much at long range, but at close quarters a double-barreled shotgun is immense."

"But not so much for actual business as a Winchester," Dan answered. "I fired but two shots and one of your enemies has a disabled wrist, and another will be food for the coyotes."

"Yes, you are a great shot. What is your name?"

"Henry Barnes," Dan answered, for he was not quite ready to reveal his identity, "and your name?"

"I am George Harris."

"Your sister?" and Dan nodded to the young girl who remained seated on the horse.

"No."

"A cousin?"

"No."

"A relative?"

"No, sir—a young lady whose acquaintance

I formed at Sticklersville, and who asked me to accompany her to Paradise. She is a very strange girl."

"Do you know where she was born?"

"The East."

"What is her business?"

"I don't know. She calls herself Nannie Dix, and is a very excellent young lady. I know nothing more except that she is an actress."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood had already made that discovery himself. There was a peculiarly professional air about the young lady, which told plainer than words could have done that she had tread the boards. Besides, the name of Nannie Dix was, a few years ago, quite familiar to all the theater-going people.

"You are Miss Nannie Dix?" said Dandy Dan of Deadwood to Nannie.

"Yes, sir."

"I have seen you."

"Where?"

"On the stage at Denver."

"Yes, I played there. Also at Boise City, Virginia City and Chicago."

"It is a little strange, Miss Dix, to find you in the wilds of Montana."

"Is it?"

"Indeed it is."

"Well, I am going to Paradise Valley."

"Have you interests there?"

"Yes."

"In the Song Bird Mining Company?"

"I have."

"Then I can understand you."

She bowed her head as though she still doubted if he understood her. Turning to George Harris, she asked:

"Are you ready to go now, George?"

"Yes, Nannie. I have just finished loading my gun, and I am ready."

He mounted his horse and rode to the side of Nannie.

Nannie was a pretty girl and George Harris was really very proud to have her for a companion.

"Have you ever been to Paradise before?"

Dan asked of George Harris.

"Yes, sir."

"Then you can guide us?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any interest in the Song Bird Mining Company?"

"No, sir."

"Do you think it a good investment?"

"Everybody says so. Mr. John Dobson thinks it is. Yes, he says it is."

"Who is Dobson?"

"President."

"How long has he been at Paradise?"

"Two years."

"What kind of a man?"

"Quiet business fellow."

"Much liked?"

"Yes."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood continued to ply him with questions about the mines and the people until they arrived at Paradise.

The trio went at once to the Paradise Hotel, which was the largest public house in the town of Paradise. Dandy Dan went in with the others, and after registering asked to have his horse put up and cared for.

"Me put up Mellikan hoss. Me feedee Mellikan man horsee, alle same," and turning round Dandy Dan of Deadwood gazed at an almond-eyed Celestial.

The Chinaman and Dan exchanged glances. Dan, turning to the proprietor, asked:

"Is he in your employ?"

"Yes."

"Well, let him come for my horse."

"Take the horse to the barn, John," said the proprietor.

"Alle lite."

"Rub him down carefully, John, before you feed him," said Dandy Dan of Deadwood.

"Alle lite. Give Chinaman two bittee."

"You shall have the money," and Dandy Dan threw a silver piece at him, which the Chinaman caught as dexterously as a practiced juggler, and hurried away.

After supper the gambling hall and saloon, with which Paradise Hotel—like every other

hotel in the mining towns of the great West is adorned—was ablaze with light and crowded with people.

There were toughs of both sexes present, and Dan was studying the various phases of character, when he was accosted by a man, who was smooth shaved and had a gray eye. There was something sinister and terrific in the man, although he spoke and acted quite genteelly.

"You are a new arrival?" he said.

"Yes, sir," Dan answered.

"Have you come to take stock in the Song Bird Company?"

"I had not thought of it."

"You are not a miner, I take it?"

"No; but I am going to be."

"You are?"

"Yes; I can learn."

"You have heard of the Song Bird Mines?"

"Yes."

"Well, what have you heard of them?"

The wicked gray eyes were fixed on Dandy Dan of Deadwood as if they would read him through. Dandy Dan knew that he had met a man who was exceedingly shrewd; at the same time too deep to be easily fathomed.

"What is your name?" the stranger asked.

"Barnes."

"I saw it on the register."

"Then why did you ask?"

"I was not sure that you were the person. Did you come with the actress?"

"You mean Nannie Dix?"

"Yes."

"I did. Who are you?"

"I am John Dobson."

"The president of the Song Bird Mining Company?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have heard of you."

"And of the mine, of course? It is one of the best paying mines in the West."

Dan said nothing. He soon excused himself and went to his room, on the second floor. At the door of his room he met the Chinaman who had taken care of his horse. Carefully looking up and down the hall, so as to be sure they were not watched, Dan said:

"I am glad you are here, John. Come in, I want to talk with you."

Opening the door, he and the Chinaman glided into the room and carefully closed and locked the door.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MINER'S DAUGHTER.

As soon as they were locked within the room, Dandy Dan of Deadwood threw himself in a chair and pointing to another said:

"Sit down, John."

John Chinaman obeyed. His name was Lee Sing, but everybody called him John as a characteristic of his nationality.

"How long have you been here, John?" Dan asked.

"Tree wholee day."

"Three days?"

"Yesee."

"Have you kept your eyes open?"

"Bette life."

"Do you stand in with them all?"

"Bette life."

"Well, John, I mean to do the boldest stroke of my life. As I told you before I sent you here it is dangerous. We've got the Vultures of Montana to fight and they are worse than road agents."

"Bette life, John understand alle 'bout it."

"Now, John, I am depending a great deal on you. Don't you betray me."

"No, no, Melican man alle lite."

"Have you been to the quartz mill?"

"Yeseel!"

"You saw the quartz?"

The Chinaman nodded.

"Now, John, you are a practical miner, what do you say of the ore?"

"No good."

"You may go now."

The Chinaman rose and went from the room. Left alone, Dandy Dan of Deadwood bowed

his head on his hand, and said:

"I wish I knew whether I could trust that George Harris or not. I need some help here, and there is no one but Lee Sing whom I know. The Chinaman is faithful, I suppose. He has been any way in the past, and I must trust him now."

Dan was about to turn in to bed despite all the confusion and uproar going on below, when the shriek of a female rose on the air above the sounds of music and dancing.

"Hello, what does that mean?" he asked himself.

He sprang to his feet, tightened his belt, and with his hand on his revolver ran down stairs.

In the dance hallway he found two men struggling, each with a knife in his hand, and a young girl about eighteen years of age screaming:

"Oh, don't let them kill Mr. Tuttle—don't let them!"

Seeing in Dan a new-comer, and one whom she might possibly enlist in her cause, she ran to him and cried:

"Please, sir, save Mr. Tuttle?"

Dan glared at the young men, who were about equally matched, and as each held the wrist of the other which had the knife, there was no great danger of their doing each other any very serious damage.

"If you will be kind enough to tell me which is Mr. Tuttle," he answered to the girl's urgent appeal, "maybe I can do something for him."

The crowd by this time were hooting and jeering like madmen. A ring had been formed around the combatants and everybody was shouting:

"Fair play!"

"Free fight!"

"Plug him, Dick!"

"Let him hev it under the fifth rib an' yer got 'im."

"That's it, Dick, wring yer hand loose."

"They are against Mr. Tuttle," the young lady cried. "They mean to kill him."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood had already made this discovery. Despite all their cry for fair play, the sympathy was for the red-headed fellow called Dick.

"Now I did not come here to engage in anybody's quarrel," Dan thought. "But I can't stand this. I must see fair play."

He parted the ring, hurling men left and right as if they were children, and seizing the combatants pushed them apart, crying:

"Hold—don't murder each other!"

His action was so sudden that for a moment the mob was paralyzed and dumb with amazement.

Then an angry yell went up on the air and a voice cried:

"Down with ther meddler!"

"Shame on you to cut each other's throats!" roared Dan.

The red-headed man, Dick Knight by name, rose from the floor where Dan had hurled him and flourishing his knife in the air leaped at Dan, crying:

"I'll cut yer throat fur yer, ye meddlin' cuss."

"Stop!"

Quick as a flash a polished six-shooter was leveled at the villain's forehead.

"Don't you take a step nearer or I will plant a bullet in your brain."

Dick Knight staggered backward awed into silence by the menacing pistol.

The crowd was again silent. Turning to Tuttle, who was evidently a young man more refined than the crowd about him, Dandy Dan said:

"Sir, you don't seem in your element here."

"You compliment me by the remark," answered Tuttle.

"Have you a revolver?" asked Dan.

"Yes."

"Draw it."

He did so.

"Now, don't hesitate to use it if it becomes necessary, for you are among enemies," remarked Dandy Dan of Deadwood.

"I understand it all, sir."

The two men, each with a six-shooter in

his hand was rather menacing to the crowd, and they gave way for them.

"Thank you, sir, thank you," said the sweet, silver-like voice at his side, and turning quickly about, Dandy Dan of Deadwood discovered the same young lady who had implored him to save Mr. Tuttle.

"You are welcome, young lady. I want to talk with you in a few moments—but this is no place."

"No, sir—I only came here to warn Mr. Tuttle. I heard the plotters behind the old barn."

"Did they plot to kill him?" asked Dan.

"Yes, sir."

"I must talk with you. Where will I find you?"

She pointed to a small frame house down the street on the opposite side of the public square, with which every town in the West is adorned, after the Spanish plan.

The young lady and rescued man spoke a few words, then she started across the street to her home. Dandy Dan turned on Tuttle and asked:

"What is your full name?"

"Norris Tuttle."

"Do you live here?"

"Yes."

"What is your business?"

"I am book-keeper for the Song Bird Mining Company."

"Oh, yes."

Dan involuntarily started as if a ray of light had suddenly broken in on him, and laid his hand on the mysterious letter which he had in his inside coat pocket.

"Who was the man who assaulted you?"

"Dick Knight, the foreman."

"Of the mine?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have quarreled?"

"Yes."

"About what?"

"The business."

"I want to talk more with you about this."

How long have you been book-keeper of the Song Bird Company?"

"Six months."

"How come you to be book-keeper?"

"Mr. James Lucas of St. Louis sent me."

"James Lucas?"

Again Dandy Dan of Deadwood started and instinctively touched his secret letter. More light was breaking in on his understanding.

"Is Mr. Lucas here?"

"No, sir."

"What, not arrived?"

"Has he started?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Dan, in some confusion. "I just supposed that if he had a mine in Montana he would come to look after it."

"He did start, sir—but has not arrived here, so his daughter says; she came yesterday."

"His daughter? Is Miss Lucas here?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"That was her in the hall who called to you."

"Very well, I must see her. I will see you to-morrow. Where do you live?"

"In the red cottage down the hill."

"What time will you go to the mine to-morrow?"

"I will not go."

"Why?"

"I am discharged. Mr. Dobson fired me this morning, and I am quite certain he was cognizant of the assault on my life."

"Well, look sharp, be very careful," said Dandy Dan of Deadwood. "I will see you to-morrow, and we will talk more about affairs. Maybe I can help you."

They parted and Dan hurried after Alice Lucas. He had reached the darkest part of the street when a smothered cry for help reached his ear.

Leaping forward, a pistol in his hand, he ran right onto a pair of masked ruffians who were trying to tie a handkerchief over Alice Lucas' mouth. He struck one down, the other fled.

Bang! went Dan's pistol.

A yell of rage and pain told that the bullet had hit its mark. The man ran staggering away, however, and though he didn't fall, he left a trail of blood behind him.

The other escaped while Dan was releasing Alice.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

It was several seconds before the girl could speak; as soon as she gained control of her voice, she said:

"I was on my way here when I was seized by these two men who were binding me when you came up."

"Do you know them?"

"No, sir, their faces were masked as you saw," she answered. "I only have my suspicions."

"Whom do you suspect they are?"

"I suspect they are some of the same men who attacked Mr. Tuttle."

"Will you allow me to accompany you to your house?"

"Yes, sir, thank you."

As they walked along Dandy Dan kept a sharp lookout right and left, lest they should be suddenly attacked by some unseen person. When they reached the door of the cottage at which Miss Lucas was staying she bade him good-night, and was about to run in when he said:

"I beg pardon, Miss Lucas, but I want to talk a moment with you. Shall I come in?"

She hesitated a moment. Dan glanced about him and in an undertone added:

"I am a friend of yours, I have come here in your interests, but I dare not ask you the questions I want to here."

"Come in."

She opened the door for him and he followed her into the small parlor. When they were seated, she fixed her great dark eyes on him and said:

"Who are you?"

With a smile, Dandy Dan of Deadwood said: "It is a general impression among people that women cannot keep a secret, but, Miss Lucas I am going to entrust you with one."

"You need not," she answered, "unless you wish."

"No, you deserve to know who I am and you will be the only person in Paradise Valley who will dream of my identity."

Dan took from that secret pocket in his coat the mysterious letter to which reference has been made on several occasions; unfolding it he handed it to her saying:

"Read it."

"Why, it's from papa!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, read it and you will understand why I am here."

She read the letter through and carefully folding it returned it to him. Then she rose, went to the door and listened. Having taken all this precaution, she returned and gazing at him, said:

"So you are the great Detective Dandy Dan of Deadwood."

"I am, and your father's interests demand that my presence here be kept a secret."

"I understand."

"And I trust you, Miss Lucas. I hope you will now see why it was necessary for me to see you."

"I do."

"Miss Lucas, let me ask you first why you are here? Does your father know you are here?"

"No—no," she answered. "I came after he left for the West. He has interests in several territories, and is looking after them."

"But you have not explained why you came here yourself."

"I will," she answered, while a deep blush suffused her face. "I am engaged to be married to Norris Tuttle, the young man whom you rescued."

"You knew him before you came here, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"And were betrothed when he came?"

"We were, sir. Mr. Tuttle was father's confidential book-keeper. Father was induced, through his friend, Mr. John Dobson, to make

heavy investments in the Song Bird Mining Company. Although reports were excellent at each clearing up, a dividend was never reached, so father induced Mr. Tuttle to come out and investigate it. He was employed as chief book-keeper. Father came to the West to look after his affairs, and I got uneasy about Mr. Tuttle and came myself alone to see if he was in danger. As has been seen I was just in time to save him by your assistance."

"Now, Miss Lucas, I want to fully understand this matter," said Dan. "Let me ask you some questions."

"Well, what are they?"

"How long has your father known Dobson?"

"All his life."

"They have been friends?"

"Yes."

"Well, what does your father really think of the Song Bird mines?"

"They are a swindle."

"Does he suspect Dobson?"

"Oh, no, no, no, no! Dobson has invested his all in those mines. He is a victim, too, if the mines are a fraud."

"Your father intended coming here?"

"Yes."

"Well, he has not. Do you think that strange?"

"Not at all. Father had many other places to visit before he came here."

Then Dandy Dan asked her a number of questions about her experience since she had been there, and took leave of the miner's daughter.

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.

WHEN Dandy Dan gained the street he saw a form crouching near the corner, and drawing his revolver, walked straight up to it.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, seizing the form by the collar.

"Holle on. Mellican man no killee John Chinaman allee saime."

"Is it you, John?"

"Betee life."

"What are you doing?"

"John Chinaman see Mellican man glo out fightee big men. John Chiaaman habbe knife, tlo, killee Mellican man if kille my Mellican man—"

"Well, that will do. Now come with me a way."

Dan led the way to an old tumble down shanty, one of the first built in Paradise Valley, and when there he halted.

"John, have you discovered anything?" he asked.

"No."

"Have you watched the mine?"

"Yesee."

"Has it been salted?"

"No."

"Were you up before the last clean up?"

"Yesee."

"Are you sure there was no salting?"

"Yesee."

"John, keep your eyes open, only help me out in this. Let us defeat the Vultures and you shall have your reward."

"Bettee life."

"Now go."

"Yesee."

The Chinaman went away to the house where he stayed and over which was the sign of "Laundry."

Dan returned to the Paradise Hotel and went to his room and to bed.

In a few moments he was soundly sleeping, notwithstanding all the exciting events through which he had passed. Dan had slept none for two nights and his slumber was profound.

He awoke not until long past daylight and then he gazed out on the town which he had been unable to see the night before.

Paradise Valley was named from its natural beauty and not from any moral quality which the valley might be supposed to possess.

Paradise Valley was one of the loveliest spots on earth, at least so Dandy Dan thought

as he gazed out on the scene being lit up by a golden sun bursting through the mountain peaks.

A busy scene greets Dan's eyes. Men are hurrying here and there through the valley, men clad as miners, and evidently inured to toil. Over the little creek which dashes far adown the pine-dressed mountain peaks, and trails its shining waters through the flowering valley, is built another structure of logs and carefully erected and thatched by a master hand with bark and grass. From the roof projects a small smokestack, from which issues a steady black column of smoke, curling lazily upward toward heaven's blue vault, and inside is heard the grinding and crushing rumble of ponderous machinery, which Dan rightly conjectured was a quartz crusher in full operation. Across from the northern side of the gulch came a steady string of mules in line, each pulling behind him a jack sled, or what is better known in the West as a stone boot, heavily laden with huge quartz rocks. These are dumped in front of one of the large doorways of the crusher, and the "empties" return mechanically and disappear within a gaping fissure in the very mountain side—a sort of tunnel which the hand of man, aided by that great and stronger arm, powder, has burrowed and blasted out.

"That has a decidedly business look," thought Dandy Dan, "and is calculated to catch half the innocent people in the world. Millions of money is being invested in Song Bird stocks. Let me see if it is principally wind, or is it a substantial reality?"

Dandy Dan dressed hurriedly and went down to his breakfast.

"I am late," he said, "but having traveled yesterday, I turned in rather late, and slept heavy."

The waiter brought him his breakfast. A few moments later the door opened and Miss Nannie Dix entered.

"You are late, Miss Dix, as well as myself?"

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose you are going to see the mine to-day?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"I believe you have some stock?"

"Yes, sir—some."

"Then you may be interested?"

"Slightly; but I am going to give an entertainment to-morrow evening and shall rehearse to-day."

"Have we an opera house here?"

"Oh, yes."

"But you have no company?"

"No, but I shall give my recitations and impersonations myself," she answered. "I shall also sing some comic ballads. Won't you come?"

"Certainly."

"Now, I want to ask you about some one?"

The girl's face became very serious.

"Whom?" he asked.

"Have you lived long in the West?"

"Yes—I have been on the frontier nearly all my life."

"Do you know many miners?"

"A great many."

"Did you ever meet one named Nix?"

"Nix—Nix!" Dan repeated the word as if the continued striking on the tablets of his memory might awaken some familiar vibration. "No, I don't think I ever did."

"Did you ever hear of him?"

"No."

Her face became very sad.

"What can have become of him?" she asked.

"How old is he?"

"If living, he must be sixty, or thereabouts."

"Do you know that he lives?"

"No."

"When did you hear of him last?"

"It has been many years. It must be six or seven at least; but he can't be dead. I promised to find him and I will."

Tears came into her great blue eyes, and she rose to leave the table not having touched her breakfast.

At this moment George Harris entered.

"What, Nannie, have you breakfasted already?"

"No, I was going away without my breakfast, George, but now I will return to the table."

At sight of George she seemed to recover her spirits and once more sat down to the table.

"Well, Nannie, I have made arrangements for the opera house."

"Thank you, George, you are an excellent manager, and I don't know what I would do without you."

"Oh, don't mention it, Nannie, I would do anything for you."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood having finished his breakfast rose to go. His eyes once more met Nannie's, and, moved by her sad face, Dan asked:

"Miss Dix, is your mission to the West partly to find the missing person of whom you spoke?"

"That is wholly my mission, sir."

"I will aid you if I can."

"Thank you, Mr. Barnes, I will reward you."

"No—no reward, no pay, Miss Dix. What I do will be done gratuitously."

"Thank you."

He bowed and went out just as George Harris said:

"You were asking him about the missing miner, were you?"

"Yes, George; was it wrong?"

"No," George answered. "Ask everybody you meet and you may learn of him after awhile."

Dandy Dan left the hotel, and remembering his engagement with Norris Tuttle, hastened down to the cottage which Tuttle had designated the night before as his present abode.

"Is Mr. Tuttle in?" Dan asked of a stout, middle-aged woman, who met him at the door.

"Yes—he ain't got up yet."

"Not up. Is he a late riser?"

"Oh, no. This air very uncommon," she said. "I never knowed him to sleep so late."

"I wish to see him for I have an engagement with him this morning."

"Come in the sittin'-room, an' I'll go up an' wake him," said the stout woman.

Dandy Dan of Deadwood entered the house, and the woman, who was short as well as stout and always out of breath, climbed the steps, panting heavily as she did so.

"Mr. Tuttle, Mr. Tuttle!" she called, "why don't ye git up?"

Dan listened for his answer, but it never came.

She called again, and then pounded on his door until it flew open. A few moments later she ran down the stairway, saying:

"Mister, he ain't thar!"

"What! Has he disappeared?"

"He ain't thar."

"Let me go to his room," said Dan.

She granted his request, and he hurried up the stairs and entered the bedroom of Norris Tuttle's bedchamber. A single glance sufficed to show him that everything was in confusion.

The bed was half off the bedstead; the clothes lay on the floor, and the chairs were turned as if there had been a struggle in the room. Dan found a slung-shot near the window, which he put in his pocket ere the woman came in.

What was most alarming was a drop or two of blood on the window-sill.

The window was open, and a long ladder leaned against it, showing just how the intruders, whoever they might be, gained admission to the apartment.

By this time the old woman was in the room.

The hundred little things which would speak volumes to a detective were nothing out of the ordinary to her.

She accounted for her boarder's disappearance by his having an early call to make. If she had seen the ladder she would have supposed he went out that way to keep from awakening the household.

Had she even seen the blood stains she would only have concluded he had a nose-bleed.

Dan did not intend to impart his suspicions to her.

"Is Mr. Tuttle in the habit of going away suddenly?" he asked.

"No."

"Did he ever do this before?"

"No."

"What time did he come in last night?"

"It was half-past ten."

"Did he go at once to bed?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear him in the night?"

"No."

"No noise in his room?"

She studied a moment, and said:

"Yes. Did hear a rampus up hyar, like some 'un er thumpin' erround. I s'pose it war him tryin' ter kill a rat that got in his room, an' I yelled out to him not to knock all the plasterin' down."

"Did he answer?"

"No."

"When do you expect him back?"

"By dinner. He'll be sure to be here then."

As Dandy Dan of Deadwood went away, he thought:

"No, he will not be here by dinner. I doubt if he ever comes back. Poor Alice Lucas, you may be widowed before you are wed."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood went directly to the Song Bird quartz mills.

Almost the first person he met was Dick Knight, the foreman, whom he had threatened the night before with his revolver.

Knight glared savagely at him and asked:

"Wot are ye doin' here?"

"I want to see the foreman."

"I am the foreman."

"I want a job."

"Got no place for you. Ain't you the feller wot put in his lip last night in the saloon?"

"I am the peace-maker who stopped the fight and perhaps saved your life."

"Yer a meddler an' I don't want nuthin' to do with ye."

"You don't?"

"No."

"Well, I will see the president."

"Won't do ye any good."

Dandy Dan could feel the fire of hate blazing from the eyes of the man who was watching him as he went away.

"That foreman is a brutal villain," Dan thought.

A small frame house standing a little apart from the quartz mill had in big letters over it, the words:

"The President's office."

To this office Dan wended his way.

He entered and found Mr. Dobson poring over some ledgers. He was alone and Dan entered so softly that his footsteps were not heard.

Dobson's brow was gathered into a knot as if he was not pleased with something.

He had a vial in his hand containing a clear kind of liquid and was dropping a drop here and there on the book and effacing the writing thereon.

"Good morning!" said Dan.

It was the first notice he had of Dan's arrival, and he bounded up, dropping the book with a bang.

"What do you want?" he asked.

Dobson was greatly annoyed.

Dandy Dan of Deadwood could play a part to perfection when he wanted to do so, so assuming a look of utmost innocence, he said:

"I beg pardon for annoying you."

"You entered so silently you startled me," he said, recovering his self-possession. "What is your business?"

"I heard you were without a book-keeper."

"Yes, we found our last book-keeper incompetent and disposed of him."

"I would like his place."

Mr. Dobson gave the applicant a curious look, as though he somewhat doubted his sincerity.

"Do you know anything about keeping books?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, I'll see about it."

There was an evil gleam in the man's cunning eye.

"Where is your book-keeper you discharged?"

"I don't know."

"He hasn't left the town, has he?"

There could be no doubt that Mr. Dobson was annoyed; he changed color half a dozen times, and said:

"I can't tell. I am not his keeper."

"Well, Mr. Dobson, I was only joking about taking his place," said Dandy Dan of Deadwood, an entire change in his manner. "I will state my business here now."

Mr. Dobson looked up and an expression of surprise swept over his face.

"I am here, Mr. Dobson, to pick up any loose stock in the Song Bird Company I may be able to get hold of."

A complete change went over Mr. Dobson. He was at once affable and agreeable.

"You want to invest?" he asked.

"Certainly. That's my business here."

"Well, sir, I will show you our statements at our last clean up."

He pulled out some papers and handed them to Dandy Dan.

"There, sir, you see a complete profit of a thousand dollars per day."

"Will it hold up?"

"Yes, it gets better."

"When do you clean up again?"

"Next week."

"You have increased your stock?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Two millions."

"Will it stand it?"

"Yes, twenty millions for that matter."

"Have you agents in the States selling your shares?"

"Yes."

Mr. Dobson seemed a little uneasy at the question, but Dandy Dan explained that he could find no shares for sale in Chicago.

"We have an agent there."

"Your showing is very good," said Dandy Dan of Deadwood. "I thought I would see your book-keeper and talk with him."

A sigh of relief which escaped the president's lips was not unnoticed by Dandy Dan of Deadwood.

"I don't know where he is. See him if you can find him, and if he tells the truth he will confirm what I say."

At this moment Dan turned to go, and met the foreman, Dick Knight, at the door.

Dick's face was as dark as a thunder cloud, and as Dan lingered a moment at the door, he heard him ask as he went to the president:

"What did he want?"

"Shares."

"Didn't he say suthin' about Tuttle?"

"Didn't guess wot had become o' him, did he?"

"Hush, fool, don't talk so much!"

Dandy Dan of Deadwood nodded his head knowingly, and turning about, went slowly away.

"I think I know the cause of that mysterious disappearance."

In a dark ravine, half way to the town from the mine, Dan suddenly came on Lee Sing, the John Chinaman.

"John, I am glad I have found you."

"Belly well, what Melican man want Chinaman?"

"Mr. Tuttle has strangely and mysteriously disappeared."

"Glone?"

"Yes."

"Dead?"

"I don't know. The Vultures of Montana have snatched him off somewhere. We must find him."

"Belly well. John Chinaman help Mellikan man alle saime."

Then Dan hastened to the hotel, wrote some letters, and dressed for dinner.

CHAPTER VI.

DANGER IN THE DARK.

DANDY DAN OF DEADWOOD had not had the courage to see Alice Lucas. He could not tell her that her betrothed had disappeared under very mysterious circumstances.

The specks of blood he had seen on the window sill would alarm her, and he had not the heart to tell her his fears.

"He may after all not be dead," Dan thought.

As soon as it was evening he sent the Chinaman to fetch his horse.

Dan was in the act of mounting when he espied the figure of a woman hurrying towards him.

"Wait!"

He knew that voice. It was Alice Lucas.

Remaining on the ground by the side of his restless, prancing steed, he waited for her to come up.

"Alice," said Dan, as a brother might have done. "This is very risky."

"I can't help it."

"Did I not warn you not to leave the house after dark?"

"You did, but it is not yet dark and I had to come."

"Why?"

"I have something so terrible to tell you."

"I expect I know it."

"No, you don't."

"What is it?"

"Mr. Tuttle—"

"Has disappeared," interrupted Dan.

"Did you know it?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No."

"Nor whether he is dead or alive?"

"Let us hope he is alive."

"Oh, I can't."

"Miss Lucas, do you want to do him a service?"

"Yes—yes! I will do anything!" she frantically answered.

"Then go back to your house and stay there."

"And you?"

"I will do all in my power for him."

"Thank you, sir, thank you!"

"Now mind you, you must remain at the house."

"Are you going—"

"I am to set out at once."

"Do you have any clew?"

"No, I set out to find one."

She turned reluctantly round and went back to the house. Dandy Dan of Deadwood stood watching her until she had disappeared within the house, and then vaulting in the saddle, galloped down the main road leading from Paradise Valley.

Half a mile away he came suddenly upon two people on horseback. At first it was so dark he could not make both of them out, but cautiously drawing nearer he discovered that one was a man and one a woman.

"Who are they?" Dan thought.

There was no better way of knowing than to listen to what they were saying. The woman, whom he knew to be a young woman, was speaking.

"I must find him, George," she said.

"Then I'll go with you to the end, Nan. But how about that engagement to-morrow night?"

"I'll get back in time to fill it."

"The house will be full."

"And our pockets full also."

"Oh, yes, full houses make full pockets. But who told you about this old man?"

"The proprietor of the Paradise Hotel."

"And you believe it is he?"

"Yes."

"Well, can the old hermit you are going to know anything about him?"

"He may, George."

"Very well—I will go with you."

Dandy Dan now recognized the pair, and galloping up to them, said:

"Good-evening."

"Is it you, Mr. Barnes?"

"Yes."

"Where are you going?"

"To Lower Gulch."

"Well, we go up the mountain. We part here. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Dan went galloping down the dark road. The road was narrow, and he found on one side a rocky wall, and on his left a dense wood with underbrush so thick a rabbit could hardly squeeze its way through them.

Suddenly Dandy Dan of Deadwood saw ahead of him a red light.

The light seemed to be suspended in the air directly over the road.

Meteor showed some signs of uneasiness, and Dandy Dan had to speak a word of encouragement to him before he would go on.

Quietly drawing his revolver, he cocked it and said, in his clear, firm voice:

"Go on, Meteor, my good fellow. Never mind that light. We will investigate it to our hearts' content and see what it is."

His horse, encouraged at the sound of his voice, went on for a few paces, and again sniffed the air uneasily.

The light still swung to and fro across the road.

"I'll see what it is or die," Dan hissed through his teeth. "Forward, Meteor!"

His horse dashed forward, and Dan was soon on the object, which was no more than a lantern hanging suspended from a branch of a tree.

The branch of the tree extended across the road, and hung down almost low enough for him to reach it.

"Hello! here is something else," Dandy Dan of Deadwood thought, as he saw a second object suspended.

Now the lantern of itself might not have excited any great attention had there been nothing else. Miners and prospectors frequently hung lanterns to guide themselves or their companions through the woods at night.

But this second object, though not so luminous as the lantern, was far more interesting.

Especially as it was a letter, and addressed to a no less personage than Dandy Dan of Deadwood himself.

"Well, since the letter is addressed to me," said Dan, "I suppose I have a perfect right to open it."

He pulled down the letter and broke the seal.

It was written in a clear, bold, but feminine hand, and as follows:

"DANDY DAN OF DEADWOOD—Don't deceive yourself. Don't flatter yourself that your identity is unknown. Everybody in Paradise Valley is on to you, and know your game. Now, the best thing you can do is to get away from here as soon as possible. If you linger about Paradise Valley you are sure to be killed."

"What is this quarrel to you! Nothing. You make no friends and many enemies by mixing up in it. Go away at once."

"A FRIEND."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood read the letter through half a dozen times, and then folding it up, thrust it into his pocket.

"I would give much to know who the fair writer is," Dan thought. "I am sure it is a woman."

But he could see no one and had not even a suspicion as to who the writer might be.

He started his horse along the road, resolved to finish his journey as he had set out to do, regardless of consequences.

The night was profoundly dark. After going beyond the glimmering rays of that lantern he could scarce see his hand before his face.

Dandy Dan of Deadwood's journey was not as aimless as the reader may suppose. After leaving the road at the head of Spirit Gulch, he came to a narrow valley, at the end of which was an old, stone house, half house and half fort. This old house to all outward appearances was deserted. It was only when one went quite close to it that an old woman, a shriveled hag, could be seen occupying a wing of the ruin.

Dandy Dan had heard of this old woman living in the ruin, and made up his mind that she in

some way was connected with the disappearance of Mr. Tuttle.

Most people thought old Montana Moll a witch, and that she had power to tell fortunes, and could lead her friends to the hidden wealth in the earth, but Dandy Dan of Deadwood accredited to her no such powers.

"She is in the employ of the vulture king, whoever he may be."

It was quite dark when Dan reached the ruin and dismounted from his steed. Meteor was quite restless, and Dan had to speak to him several times before he became quiet.

At sound of his master's assuring voice, the animal, always obedient and trusting, ceased to stamp the earth and sniff the air.

Dan looked up at the dark old ruins rearing above him like some vast monumental hill of by-gone ages. He heard the whirr of great wings, and the screech of owls awoke the slumbering echoes of the distant hills.

"I really don't wonder at the superstitious believing the place to be haunted," said Dandy Dan of Deadwood. "I could almost believe it myself."

There was no light in any part of the old ruin, and as there was no moon and the sky obscured with clouds, shutting out the feeble rays of the stars, darkness was almost complete.

"This is a hard place to guess at," Dan thought. "If the old hag is here, she is probably asleep; at least she has no light."

Knowing that some one more dangerous than an old woman might lurk about the dark pile, he took the precaution to keep a cocked pistol in his hand.

He was groping his way along a wing, when a sharp, shrill female voice cried:

"Wot d'yer want?"

"Are you the old woman that lives here?" Dan asked.

"Yes, wot yer prowlin' erbout my house et this time o' night for?"

"I wanted to see you."

"Me?"

"Yes."

"Wot yer want ter see me for, Dandy Dan, yer don't think I kin tell fortunes, do yer?"

Had a thunderbolt fallen at Dandy Dan's feet, he could not have been more amazed. How did she know him? Who had apprized her of his approach, and how was she aware that he despised her arts as a foreteller of the future?

"I want to ask you about a friend of mine who disappeared recently," Dandy Dan finally said.

"Yer mean yer want ter know ef he air here?"

"Yes."

"He ain't."

"Can I search the ruins?"

"Search 'em much ez yer want to, et won't do yer no good. I tell yer, Norris Tuttle ain't hyar."

"Where is he?"

At this there came a dry chuckle, just such a horrible laugh as might issue from the dry throat of a mummy that had been dead a thousand years. Unsuperstitious as he was, Dandy Dan of Deadwood could not repress a shudder.

"Yer want me ter tell yer?" the hoarse, dry voice asked. "Yer want me ter tell yer, an' yit yer say ter yerself I can't tell fortunes."

"Did I say it?"

"Yer thought it."

"Well, will you let me come in?" he asked.

"Air yer willin' ter run ther chances?"

"What chances?" Dan asked.

"Ov never coming out."

"Yes."

There was no answer. He heard the jingling of a chain, a door creaked on its rusty hinges, and a pale, blue light issued from the cracks. The door opened and Dandy Dan of Deadwood at rebellion with himself for entertaining a moment's dread of the old creature entered.

Old Montana Moll sat on a stool, a little old creature, whose keen black eyes seemed like living coals of fire. A pot hung from an old-

fashioned rack in the chimney over some glowing coals.

There was a simmering in the pot which reminded Dan of the kettle and three witches in Macbeth. The old woman said not a word as Dan entered. There was a jingling of chains, and a monster bull-dog, with great ferocious teeth gleaming like steel-pointed daggers, rose from a corner and growled at Dan.

Dan still held his cocked pistol in his hand.

The old woman continued to smoke her cob pipe, and weird and witch-like, gazed at the new-comer.

"Wall, wot d'yer want?" she asked.

"As you pretend to know all things, you might know what I want."

The old hag saw she was about to lose her reputation as a fortune teller, and said:

"I allers give anybody er chance ter say fur 'emselves. But, like ez not, ye'll lie ter me."

"I shall not," Dan answered, quickly. "I came to search the ruins."

"Yer did?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Wall, did yer reckin ther danger?"

"I know all, Moll, and I am one who never hesitates at danger."

"Why didn't yer come in daytime?"

"I have reasons for coming in the night."

"Why didn't yer bring some 'un with yer?"

"Because I prefer to come alone."

"Wall, ef yer will take ther chances, I can't help it."

The dog had come the full length of his chain, and he was straining every muscle to break it. He was not howling, not even growling now, but the ominous snapping of his terrible teeth gave warning to Dan what he would do if he could get loose.

"Madam, is that a favorite pet of yours?" Dan coolly asked.

"Yes."

"If you don't wish to have it shot dead at your feet you had better bid it lie down!"

At a word from the old woman, who realized that her visitor was not to be trifled with, the dog went back and laid down on his bed of straw. She gave Dan a candle and he set out to search the ruins, candle in one hand and revolver in the other.

He came to a stone hallway or passage and was descending a flight of steps, when in a niche on his right he espied a man armed with an ax. At this moment a puff of wind extinguished the candle just as the man raised the ax.

Dan was in the dark.

CHAPTER VII.

DANDY DAN OF DEADWOOD CAPTURED.

DANDY DAN OF DEADWOOD had the presence of mind to leap aside, and the ax struck one of the stone steps.

Crack! went his pistol.

A yell of pain followed the shot, and he heard the man whom he had wounded retreating.

Realizing that his life depended on his coolness, Dandy Dan of Deadwood never for a moment lost his presence of mind, but with a remarkable nerve took a match from his vest pocket and lighted the candle.

A few drops of blood on the stone steps told that his ball had not missed.

"But what was he to do?" he asked himself.

Voices were heard below and above. The voices of angry men. And he knew that they would annihilate him if he were discovered. He quickly extinguished the light. Odds were too great against him, and he resolved to retreat.

Gliding quickly from the stairway, he reached a large stone column, behind which he crouched, holding a cocked revolver in either hand.

The whispers which through the ruins seemed so ghost-like reached his ears, and Dan knew his pursuers were searching for him.

Occasionally a pale blue light, a ghostly

flame which seemed to be held by no human hand, gleamed among the columns and walls.

Dan crept further and further away—sometimes climbing through a hole in the wall or over a mass of debris, sometimes creeping on hands and knees along a corridor, until he gained a window.

He hesitated here for a moment undecided. It was hard to give up the struggle, since he was confirmed in the belief that he had in reality found the Vultures' nest.

"It's Dandy Dan of Deadwood," he heard a voice distinctly say. "We know his business here, and we also know it's certain ruin if he gets away."

This remark decided Dan. He was only one against many, and he decided to go at once. He crept from the window and dropped gently to the ground. There were a few trees standing there which increased the Plutonian darkness.

Hearing the voices still in the ruins, the daring detective scout crept to his horse, and unfastening the rein led him a short distance, and mounting, galloped away.

"I have found the Vultures' nest," he said.

"Now for the Vultures themselves."

Dan reached the town just at dawn of day. He found Lee Sing, the Chinaman, asleep on the front porch and awoke him after considerable difficulty.

"Take my horse and put him up," said Dan.

"Allee lite."

"I'm going to bed. Call me at eight."

"Allee lite."

The young detective went up-stairs to bed, and at eight was promptly awakened by the Chinaman.

"Come in," said Dan. "I want to talk with you."

"Allee lite."

The Chinaman entered, and Dandy Dan commanded him to close the door. When he had done so he said:

"Lee, we've got a traitor among us somewhere."

The Chinaman gazed at him out of his almond-shaped eyes and shook his head, implying he did not understand him.

"I have been betrayed by some one," Dandy Dan of Deadwood continued. "I don't know who this traitor is, but I would give much to learn."

"Alle lite; John Chinaman findes him."

"Last night I received a letter warning me that I was discovered; that everybody knew I was Dandy Dan of Deadwood, and that unless I left the country, I would be killed. Now I don't intend to go. I am here for an object, and, until that is accomplished, I shall stay."

"Alle lite."

The Chinaman left him, and went, as usual, to watch the quartz mill, and to try to pick up what information he could concerning the missing book-keeper.

After breakfast Dan called on Miss Lucas and had a long interview with her. She was not very hopeful, but he gave her some encouragement.

"Do you think we could trust Mr. Dobson?" Dan asked.

"Certainly. He is father's oldest and most trusted friend."

"Well, Miss Lucas, I act on a principal very safe, and never dangerous."

"What?"

"Trust no one."

"Do as you think best," she answered, "but you can trust Mr. Dobson, I know."

Dan called on Dobson, and found him smiling and much more affable than on the previous day. After they had talked of the shares in the company and the prices of them, Mr. Dobson asked Dan if he had been about much, and how had he spent the previous night. To this the detective answered very well. He had taken a short ride, had admired the country, and was interested in the old ruin at the head of the valley.

Mr. Dobson turned pale and asked:

"You saw the ruin?"

"Yes—what was it?"

"An old Spanish house, but I never go there."

"Why?"

"It's haunted," and he turned very pale and shuddered. "I would not go near there if I were you—it's dangerous—no good can come of it."

Dan changed the subject, and after partially negotiating for a thousand shares of the stock, for which he was to pay twenty per cent. down, he left the miner.

"I would keep away from that old ruin if I were you," said Mr. Dobson, following him to the door of his office.

"Thank you. I shall follow your advice, I suppose, as there are no gold mines at the ruins."

On reaching the hotel, Dandy Dan of Deadwood found Nannie Dix and George Harris returned.

"We spent the night at a mountain house," said Nannie to Dan. "I went there to inquire about the person I asked you about."

"Did you learn anything of him?"

"No," she answered, sadly. "But George has promised to help me find him. Won't you, George?"

"Yes."

"I see handbills everywhere, announcing your performance to-night," said Dan.

"Oh, I shall give the entertainment. Have you secured a seat?"

"Not yet, but I will."

"Here is a 'comp,'" she said, handing Dan a ticket. "Will you take any one with you?"

"Probably."

"Here is another."

"Thank you, but I don't feel like enjoying your entertainment without paying."

"Never mind that," and the actress gave her pretty head a toss and laughed in a way to convey to the public that money was not much of an object to her.

That evening Dan called on Alice and asked her if she would care to go to the show, and Alice, who was still grieving over the disappearance of Mr. Tuttle, at first declined but Dan whispered a few words to her and she consented.

The theater was packed to its utmost. Miss Nannie Dix, the favorite soubrette, appeared and was hailed with a storm of applause and a shower of bouquets. She gave an excellent entertainment. Reciting many selections and singing all the popular ballads of the day she carried the town by storm.

When the entertainment was over, Dan turned to go and met a pair of eyes on the opposite side of the theater which were familiar to him. Where had he seen those eyes before he asked himself. They were black, snake-like and watched him with a ferocious cunning, until he turned to get a square look at the man's face and then they turned another way.

Try as he would Dandy Dan of Deadwood was unable to recall where he had seen that face before. He accompanied Miss Lucas home and after a few words of encouragement went to his room at the hotel.

Dandy Dan went to bed at once and soon fell asleep. In his sleep he seemed to be still troubled by that white face and sharp, keen eyes blazing and scintillating like diamonds.

He dreamed also that he was in the power of the vultures of Montana. Not men but real terrible vultures, with great beaks ready to tear his flesh and eyes, which glittered like steel-pointed daggers.

They swooped down so close to him that he could feel their wings and beaks. He tried to cry out but his voice failed him; he tried to move but his arms and legs were powerless.

In the struggle he awoke. A strange light was in the room and over him bent a masked man.

He tried to move but his arms and legs were tied. He tried to cry out but he was gagged, and unable to utter a word.

There were three or four other men in the room, one of whom was holding a dark lantern.

"Well, are all ready?" a voice asked.

Dan recognized that voice. It was Gabriel Le Noir or Black Gabriel, the chief of the Vultures, and who had come to him at his camp as related in the first chapter of this story.

"Yes," some one answered.

"Is the way clear?" Le Noir asked.

"All clear."

"Ben!"

"Yes."

The last voice came from the door.

"How is all without?"

"Quiet."

"No one awakened?"

"No."

"Then we'll go. This is better than the last."

"Yes, chief, he kicked."

The men all wore black masks over their faces, and spoke in tones but little above whispers, but Dandy Dan having recognized the chief, knew full well that they were members of that strange organization which were called Vultures, and who were in reality human vultures.

Dandy Dan of Deadwood was carefully lifted from the bed by two strong men who followed the man with the lantern. He naturally expected to be carried out of a window, but to his surprise they went to a corner of the room, where one of them touched a spring and a space in the corner the size of a door bell and revealing a pair of narrow winding stairs which they descended, carrying the prisoner with them.

Down, down, down they went into the ground until they must, he knew, be far below the house. Then they came to a long corridor or cavern.

It all seemed so strange, so like a dream to Dandy Dan of Deadwood, that he hardly believed that it was not a dream.

The house was, he correctly surmised, built over a cavern, and this secret communication with it an artificial construction.

"Bring him on," said Black Gabriel, hurrying ahead of the others.

Dan was carried hurriedly forward, he could not tell how far, but he knew it must be miles.

At last they came to a halt where the grotto seemed to widen out into a good-sized stone chamber.

The place was provided with stools, chairs and sofas, and a table.

Dan was placed on a couch and the banditti held a few moments' silent consultation.

Then the chief came to the prisoner and removed the handkerchief from his mouth. By this movement Dandy Dan knew that he was to talk with the chief.

He was not mistaken.

"Well, sir, are you awake?" the Vulture asked.

"Yes."

"Have you any conception where you are and in whose power you are?"

"Yes. I am in your power and you had as well remove your mask—I know you."

"Do you?"

"I do."

"Who say you I am?"

"Black Gabriel. I saw you to-night at the theater."

"Did you?"

"Yes. You were disguised. I recognized you all the same by your eyes."

"Since you are so shrewd in penetrating my identity, I wish to inform you that you are known."

"Am I?"

"Yes, Dandy Dan of Deadwood, you are a very clever young man, but clever as you are, I am able to read you."

Dandy Dan was silent.

Again Black Gabriel turned to his men and conversed with them for a few moments.

One of them said:

"Let's do it and have it over with."

"Not here."

"Where?"

"In the wood."

"Too far, ain't it?"

"No—we can have it all done and over with long before daylight."

"It's three miles."

"I know it."

"And he's heavy to carry that far?"

"Yes."

"Make him walk," put in another.

"Yes, let's make him walk."

Black Gabriel assented to the proposition himself, and came back to where Dan lay.

Untying his legs, he said:

"Dan, we are going to travel."

"May I ask where?"

"Yes, my dear boy, as you are to be one of the party it is but natural you should want to know something of the journey."

"I am to go, am I?"

"Certainly. Don't you see I am releasing your legs for that purpose?"

"Yes."

"Well, we are going to the woods, not far from town."

"In Paradise Valley."

"How good you are at guessing."

"Well, when we get to the wood?"

"There is to be a short ceremony there, Daniel, in which you will be the chief actor."

"What is it?"

"Well, it will be under a large oak tree, with an elegant projecting limb. Now, can't you guess the remainder?"

"A hanging bee?"

"Certainly. Dan, you are really a charming fellow. You have such a very bright intellect. It does one good to meet with a man of talent."

"It will do you good, or rather the public good, Black Gabriel, before we have terminated our acquaintance."

"Thank you. There, now your legs are free. Get up."

Dan rose.

He tried to liberate his hands, but all in vain.

He was tied so tightly that it was beyond the power of human strength.

He was now surrounded by four of the masked Vultures of Montana, and with Black Gabriel leading the way, they started to the place of execution.

CHAPTER VIII.

GRIZZLY JAKE AGAIN.

DANDY DAN OF DEADWOOD was very calm. His face was white, his eyes unusually bright and his limbs rigid. But there was nothing of the cringing coward about him now that he had come to face death. He had been in the right. He had been acting for justice and humanity, but he had failed.

"Never mind," he thought, "I have done my duty, and if fate decrees that I shall die I will meet my fate like a man."

The night was cloudless, and he noticed that the stars in the heavens were very bright and glimmered down calmly and peacefully on the dark wood which was to witness the last of Dandy Dan of Deadwood.

They came to a hill, from which, in the distance of not over three or four miles, the village could be seen quite distinctly. Dandy Dan of Deadwood saw the distant lights, and thought unless some miracle interposed to save him he was perhaps gazing on them for the last time in life.

He put on his boldest, defiant manner when the fatal tree was reached.

"Now, sir," said Black Gabriel, "here is the spot on which you are to see the last of earth."

"I had guessed as much."

"Dan, you seem very cool."

"Why should I not be cool?"

"Do you want to die?"

"No."

"You seem indifferent."

"I would rather live."

"But people say life is a burden."

"It is not that life is so sweet as much as that death is so awful, which makes us dread to die."

"Yet you seem calm."

"Hadn't I as well be? What good would it do me to scream and shout?"

"None."

"Then I shall not needlessly exert myself."

"Have you no request to make?"

"No."

"Do you want to take your boots off?"

"No. Brave men have no fear of dying with their boots on."

"Dan, you are an enigma."

Dan made no answer, and one of the masked men now approached the leader and said in a whisper:

"We had better hurry up with this 'ere hanging, cap. 'Twon't be long afore the peep o' day, an' then we must clar out."

"Bring a rope."

The fellow went for a rope and Black Gabriel pointing to the eastern sky growing lighter and rosier with the increasing dawn, said:

"Dandy Dan of Deadwood, do you see that increasing light in the east?"

"Yes."

"In an hour from now the sun will be shining in this valley, now so dark and silent. In an hour the birds will be singing and the whole valley will be awakened into life, all save you. Your dead body will be discovered by some passer-by, swaying in the morning breeze, and on your breast will be found the badge of the Vultures of Montana, bearing evidence that this is their work."

Dan made no answer.

The remark was made he knew to harrow up his soul, and make his few remaining moments on earth as terrible as possible.

The rope was brought. It was a common lariat.

A noose was made at one end, and the rope placed about the neck of the prisoner.

"Now, two of you take the other end and fling it over the limb of the tree," said Black Gabriel. When this was done, he said:

"I will now count three, and you will raise him up until his toes are four feet from the ground."

Dan was unmoved.

The Vultures of Montana evidently expected him to break down in the last awful moment and implore them to spare him, but in this they were mistaken.

"One, two, three!"

Dan felt the rope tighten, his senses were stunned, he gasped and struggled as his feet were lifted off the ground. But at this supreme moment there came a sharp crack of a rifle on the air, and Dan fell coughing and gasping to the ground.

He heard a yell which would have done credit to a dozen wild Apaches, and a man burst through the bushes, crying:

"Hold on, thar, yer consarned galoots. I'll knock ther socks off'n every pesky dratted skunk ermong yer. Listen ter Sweetlove's pups bark."

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

The sharp crack, crack, cracking of revolvers rang out like a fusillade from a pair of Gatling guns. High above the rattling crash of firearms could be heard the same eccentric voice shouting:

"Oh, my! Oh, ain't this glorious! Come right at me ef yer want ter find yerselves in er'condemned leetle diffikilty. Ho, sound ther tocsins o' terror—ring ther bells o' doom. Buckle right down ter it lively, my boys. Most fun I've seed since my grandmaw's funeral."

Although Dandy Dan was unable to see the owner of that voice, he knew full well it was his friend of the forest, old Grizzly Jake himself.

He continued to pour the contents of his revolvers at the retreating bandits until they were out of reach, and then, like an experienced hunter, reloaded his weapons before taking another step.

While engaged in that, however, his tongue continued to wag.

"That air is jist allers ther way. Erbout ther time I git my jints ter workin' easy, they air up an' gone afore I kin do one thing with 'em. Wall, thar's one, I guess, wot air freed from this 'ere world o' mortal keer. Looks very comfortable lyin' thar on the grass. Holdin' er rope ter hang some 'un didn't agree with 'im."

He then went to Dandy Dan, who was sitting on the ground trying to work loose the noose which was about his neck.

It was but the work of a moment to release him and cut the bonds which bound his hands and feet.

"Wall, pilgrim, I rather guess yer had a clus shave."

"Rather, Grizzly Jake, and I have you to thank for getting me out of a serious scrape a second time."

"Why, dog my cats, if it ain't the same young pilgrim wot Black Gabriel war arter on ther river."

"Yes."

"Wall, he cotched yer?"

"Yes."

"Whar?"

"In bad."

"In bad?"

"Yes. At the Paradise Hotel."

"When?"

"Last night."

Grizzly Jake rubbed his grizzled head with his fingers and muttered:

"May I be contarnilly hornswaggled ef I know what the deuce take it them air fellers air fit for but to kill. Why, gosh tribe my numbskull ef I don't berlieve I'd better gird up my loins an' wade inter 'em until I knock ther socks clean off'n every mother's son on 'em."

"Jake, you have been my friend, and I believe I can trust you."

"Yer needn't try 'nless yer want ter do it, pilgrim."

"But I want to."

"Why?"

"Because I need your help. Those fellows already know my secret, and now I am going to impart it to you."

"Wot yer got, a secret?"

"Yes."

"Wall, pilgrim, I ain't er hankerin' arter secrets, but ef yer want any pulverizin' done, it air right in my line."

"I understand you, Jake. You are a brave, honest fellow. I know you have saved my life twice, and you may have your faults, but you are noble—"

"Don't go ter stuffin' me on taffy, pilgrim."

"Jake, I am Dandy Dan of Deadwood."

"Wot!"

Grizzly Jake leaped fully three feet high at the announcement, and on alighting, looked at the man before him very much as if he had discovered a long concealed wonder.

By this time day had dawned, and the rising sun fell full on the face of Dandy Dan of Deadwood.

"Yes, Jake, I am that person."

Jake glared at the neat velvet coat, immaculate white shirt, tie, and superabundance of diamonds which adorned the person of Dan, and exclaimed:

"Wall, pilgrim, I believe yer. I allers knowed yer war somebody, but whuther yer war ther Grand Juke 'Lexis ur Prince o' Wales, I couldn't jist make out. But now yer wot's better. Yer Dandy Dan o' Deadwood, one ez kin kerflummox all the jukes an' princes on airth."

"I am here on very important business, Jake—to save an excellent family from ruin, to save a life, and bring some rascals to justice."

"Which all air very fine undertakin', pilgrim, an' ef yer want ther socks knocked off'n anybody jist remember I am in ther perferession."

"I may need your services."

"Yer kin hev 'em. Jist spit out wot yer want."

"Do you know the old ruins at the head of the gulch, an old Mexican tower?"

Grizzly Jake's face began to turn ghastly white. His hand, which in dealing out death to the enemy, or in the hottest of the fight never trembled, was now quaking like an aspen.

"Say, pilgrim, yer don't mean et, dcr yer?"

"Yes."

"Ther ha'nted tower?"

"Yes—do you know it?"

"Gosh, I guess I do, pilgrim. I ain't spent fourteen y'ars right hyar in this 'ere valley 'ithout knowin' o' that place. But say, pilgrim, don't less go thar."

"Why?"

"Thar's real dead ghosts thar."

Nearly all of the ignorant people of the frontier have a strange superstitious dread of ghosts. They may deny believing in them, yet they fear them just the same. Dandy Dan could not but smile at the old man.

"I was there night before last, Jake."

"War yer?"

"Yes."

"Wot did yer find?"

"Jake, I found no ghosts, but the place is haunted by Black Gabriel and his band. Now, I want you to come with me to-night. I can trust no one but you and my Chinaman, whom I keep busy watching the quartz mill. A young man is a captive there. I want to rescue him to-night, and I can trust no one but yourself."

"Pilgrim," said Jake, "I'll go with yer, an' ef any gol nation sink fired ghost comes er foolin' round me, I'll knock the socks right off'n it."

"Come to town?"

"No, I'll meet yer right hyar ter-night when ther church clock at the village counts ten."

"Very well."

Dan left him.

CHAPTER IX.

MORE MYSTERIES.

MORE mysteries were in store for the Deadwood detective. It seemed as if the mysteries were never to come to an end.

As Dandy Dan was hastening along the narrow road which led through the wood to the village, he was suddenly amazed to find a bundle drop from a tree into the road before him. He looked up into the top of the tree, but could see nobody. He looked right and left into the wood for the person who had dropped the bundle, but not a living human being was to be seen.

Then he turned to the inspection of the bundle. It was wrapped in coarse, strong paper, and to his utter amazement addressed to:

"DANDY DAN OF DEADWOOD."

"Well, if the bundle is mine," Dan thought, "there can be no harm in me opening it, and seeing just what it contains."

Consequently, he opened the bundle and found his own morocco belt full of cartridges, his revolvers and bowie knife.

Had Dandy Dan seen a genuine ghost, he could not have been more astonished. He made haste to buckle on the belt, and in doing so a folded note fell from the bundle. The note was addressed to him likewise, and opening it, he read:

"DANDY DAN OF DEADWOOD.—Be warned a second time of the terrible danger which menaces you, and leave Montana. I am your friend and will do all I can to save you, but I am powerless to aid you, should you again fall into the power of Black Gabriel. I have restored your weapons to you; now go."

"A FRIEND."

"The writing is the same as the person who advised me two nights ago," Dandy Dan of Deadwood thought. "Well, I have a friend, a mysterious friend it is true, among these Vultures. No doubt it is a woman. But I will not take her warning although she undoubtedly means well."

He went to the village and acted as though nothing had happened. Mr. Dobson met him at the door of the hotel. Dobson started as if he had seen a ghost. After a moment he recovered himself a little and asked:

"Where have you been?"

"For a walk."

"Do you often take walks before breakfast?"

"Quite frequently."

Dan entered the house and came down at eight to breakfast. Nannie Dix was at the table. He congratulated her on her success of the night before. While they were talking she asked:

"What is the matter with your neck, Mr. Barnes? There is a red streak around it, and it is turning blue."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood had not thought

of the rope leaving a mark on his neck, and he was a little confused at it.

"I was troubled with a sore throat, and put a mustard draft on my neck last night," he said.

This partially satisfied the girl.

He took care to tie a handkerchief about his neck before going out on the street. Dan at once repaired to the cottage where Miss Lucas stayed, to consult with her, as it was an agreement that they were to consult every day.

"I want to see Miss Lucas," he said to the woman who owned the cottage.

"She is not here."

"Not here?" cried Dan.

"No, sir."

"Where is she gone?"

"I don't know."

"When did she go?"

"Last night."

"At what hour?"

"Don't know."

"Did she tell you she was going?" Dan asked, his heart giving wild throbs.

"No."

"Madam, do you suspect she has been carried off?"

"No."

"She has. Let me see her room."

But when Dandy Dan of Deadwood reached the room the bed had been made, the room swept, and everything put to rights. He inquired about the condition of the room, and learned that it had been tumbled up some, and the window was open as if Miss Lucas had eloped in the night by means of that.

"She has been abducted; spirited away; carried off," said Dan, who was disgusted with the woman's apparent indifference.

"D'ye think so?"

"I know it."

The woman began to wring her hands and cry.

Dan left her and went to the hotel.

"I wonder where that Chinaman is?" he said, as he was on the way. "Was he, too, abducted? Everybody who aids me in this fight against odds is abducted."

At this moment, however, he saw the Chinaman coming around a house. He called to him, and the celestial hurried towards him.

"Lee Sing, be at my room at the hotel in ten minutes."

"Alle lile."

"Now go away."

"Alle lile."

It seemed as if they had met by accident, and each one was in a moment going his own way. One might have stood on the opposite side of the street, and would have seen nothing suspicious in the meeting of the white man and the celestial.

Dandy Dan went directly to his room, and at the appointed moment the Chinaman was there.

"Close the door."

The Chinaman did so.

"Any one listening?"

"No."

"Well, where were you last night?"

"Watchee—watchee mill all nights."

"Did you see anything suspicious?"

"No."

"Any one go there?"

"No."

"Did you watch the sluices?"

"Yesee."

"Would you have seen any one had they come there?"

"Bettee lile."

"Well, no one came?"

"Golle, no."

"Well, Lee, a young lady was carried away—Miss Lucas."

The Chinamen gave a grunt and thrusting his hands in his pockets seemed waiting for orders.

"Some one has betrayed me, Lee Sing. Some one has given our plans away."

The Chinaman gave utterance to a whistle, and said:

"Bettee lile me find him."

"Keep your eyes open, Lee Sing, I am de-

pending mainly on you now, to see that the mine isn't salted before the next clean-up day."

"Bett life."

Then the almond-eyed celestial turned about and wend his way out of the house. From the wind Dandy Dan of Deadwood watched him and id:

"There goes as faithful a fellow as ever lived, I codd trust my life with him."

At dusk Dan ordered his horse.

"Yer in' ter take another night ride?" asked the proprietor of Paradise Hotel.

"Yes."

"Goin' ir?"

"No."

"By the way, yer'd better look out. A feller was fud dead up on ther hill this mornin'. He w: shot through and through the head and robed."

"Who ws it?" Dan asked.

"A fellervot worked in the mines a few weeks ago."

Dan knew it was the man whom Grizzly Jake had sht. One of the Vultures of Montana who ws about to hang him.

"Was he an honest sort of fellow?" Dan asked.

"Yes."

"Well known?"

"Tolerably."

"Quarrels me?"

"Only when in licker. They say he war killed for his money."

"Well, I will try to avoid assassins, yet I must exercise my horse."

Dandy Dan mounted his horse and galloped away over the valley, and was soon out of sight of the village.

At the appointed hour he found Grizzly Jake at his post.

"Wall, pilgrim, yer on hand ready ter sot out, be ye, fur ther land whar ther ghosts walk all night?"

"Yes. Are you ready?"

"I am."

"Come on."

Dandy Dan rode and the old man walked at his side. They pressed on through the forest and darkness, and soon came in sight of the great weir, old pile which Dan had visited on a former occasion.

Dan dismounted and tied his horse to a small tree.

"Goin' on foot, pilgrim?"

"Yes, come on."

They crept up closer and closer to the old ruin, halting behind trees and stones to reconnoiter.

"Do you see anything?" Dan asked.

"No."

"Get closer."

They crept nearer.

"Say, pilgrim," whispered Grizzly Jake.

"Well?"

"Don't yer feel suthin' kinder icy like ther wind blowin' off'n er dead man's face?"

"No."

"I do."

"It's your imagination."

"Wall, pilgrim, my 'maginashun air erbout ter gin me er chill."

"Watch for some of Black Gabriel's band."

"Yer bet I've got my two eyes peeled wide."

They passed half way around the house, and Dan paused.

The sky was clearer, and the night was lighter than on the former night which Dandy Dan of Deadwood spent at this place. He went a little closer to the house, and whispering to his companion, said:

"Jake, stay here and watch that window at the side of the house."

"One nex' ter ther top?"

"Yes."

"Wall, wot yer goin' ter do?"

"I am going to make a complete circuit of the house. Now I want you to watch that window, and tell me of everything you see."

"I'll do it, pilgrim. Say, ef yer hyar me screech like er painter, yer must git back hyar ter me ez fast ez yer kin."

"I will, but you must not screech."

"Won't, ef I kin help it, but ef I see er ghost er floppin' its wings erbout me I'd be mighty apt ter yell."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood left him and went to the north end of the house. He was slowly working his way around it, carefully examining and studying every window and opening in the building.

When he had got on the opposite side from where he had left the old scout, he heard a yell.

Dan ran back to him as fast as his legs could carry him over the rough ground and stones. He found Grizzly Jake standing where he had left him, his face covered with his hands.

"What's the matter?" Dan asked a little sharply.

"Didn't yer see it?"

"See what?"

"Her face."

"No."

"Wall, ez I war er standin' hyar lookin' et that winder up yander, right whar yer told me ter keep my peepers fixed, thar suddingly came er face ter ther winder."

"A face—what kind of a face?" asked Dan.

"Oh, et war sich a face. Fust there came a blue blaze er flickerin' all over ther winder everywhar. Et darted hyar an' thar an' then through et this face came. Ther face whar white ez snow, long black hair and eyes. I never seed sich wild eyes in all my life."

Dandy Dan of Deadwood was about to laugh at the old man's fear, when he suddenly whispered:

"Look, look!"

"Where?"

"Ter ther winder."

Dan looked.

"It's comin' agin—oh, it's comin' agin!"

There came from the window the same pale blue light which Dandy Dan of Deadwood had remarked on his former visit; a light no doubt produced, in part at least, by sulphur.

Then there issued from the house a strange, weird, white face, with great, blazing eyes. It glared about and disappeared.

"Come!" said Dan.

"Whar yer goin'?"

"I am going into the house to solve this mystery. Are you afraid to follow?"

"No, by ther jumpin' grasshoppers o' Kansas, I'll go whenever yer go, an' knock ther socks off'n any ghost at lives, pilgrim!"

They entered the ruin.

CHAPTER X.

NAN FINDS HER FATHER.

DANDY DAN OF DEADWOOD had taken the precaution to bring with him his pocket lantern, and lighting it, he entered by the same door he had entered the night before. The old woman was not there, and they searched everywhere, far and near, for her, without avail.

Then they went from apartment to apartment without finding a living human being. Finally they climbed a pair of rickety old stairs and reached the upper story, and from there went to the attic, from the window of which old Grizzly Jake had seen the white face of the woman.

Jake followed with some hesitation, for he had a superstitious dread of the place. But when the attic was reached and every room carefully searched not a person or a thing could be seen.

"Jake, there is no one here."

"But thar wor, pilgrim."

"I know it."

"I tell yer, pilgrim, I don't like this 'ere ghost business. I kin stand fightin' Injuns, greasers, road agents, grizzly bears and er-most everything thet lives, but when it comes ter tacklin' er blue blaze an' ghost head, I'm not in it."

"There are no ghosts."

"Then wot wuz that?"

"Some kind of an ingenious contrivance to frighten us away. Although we see no one here, Jake, I fully believe the Vultures are now within this building."

"Then let's knock the socks off'n 'em."

"We want to find them first."

They set out to rumaging the old ruin from

attic to cellar but no one could be found. Dan thought there must be secret doors somewhere in the building by which they had escaped, but could find none and finally gave it up and went with Jake toward the village.

On the way Dan told how he had been kidnapped and carried from his room the night before, and Jake assured him the landlord of the Paradise Hotel was one of the gang of Vultures.

"Come with me to the village," said Dan.

"Can't, pilgrim. Ef I could leave my appetite behind me an lock et up when I git thar I mought be all right, but I can't go. Ye'd better not go back yerself."

"I won't; but won't you come in the morning, I want to see you?"

"I reckon so."

Dan left him and went to the town.

Scarce had he alighted at the hotel when he was arrested by a man claiming to be an officer.

"Of what am I charged?" he asked.

"Murder, sweet innocence. Ye killed a man on the hill last night."

"I did not," Dan answered.

"Ye didn't, eh? Mr. Dobson saw ye comin' from thar, and the dead man's purse and gold war found in yer room."

Dandy Dan at once saw that he was to be made the victim of a most villainous plot. In vain he plead his innocence.

The crowd gathered about him, and there was strong talk of lynching him on the spot.

Mr. Dobson came up, and quieting the crowd, said:

"Let him make any explanation he desires. Go on, Dandy Dan of Deadwood, tell what you have to say."

Dan then proceeded in as few words as possible to tell how his room had been entered by a secret door, and he chloroformed and carried away through a passage, he knew not whither, into a cavern; of the attempt to hang him, which was frustrated by old Grizzly Jake.

"Well, that's a likely yarn he has spun," said the proprietor of Paradise Hotel. "A secret door in my room, indeed!"

"There is," said Dan.

"Let us all go and see if there is, gentlemen," said Mr. Dobson. "That is the best way to test it."

"That's fair!" cried the landlord. "Come on—I'll show you if I'm in league with the Vultures of Montana or if it is he."

Dan was led up-stairs with the others, and they searched the place thoroughly, but so cunningly had the secret door in the corner been constructed that they could not find it. Our hero's hands were tied so he could not move them and he was disarmed.

"There is no door here," said Mr. Dobson.

"Wait until morning and I will prove myself clear," said Dan.

Dobson, who pretended to be something like fair, insisted they should wait until morning. Meanwhile, Dan was guarded, the town filled up with rough-looking men from the mines, and there were frequent threats of lynching and much talk of ropes. The prisoner's only hope was that Grizzly Jake might come next morning and establish the truth of his story.

Next morning he was again taken to his room, in company with half a dozen business men.

"Now, gentlemen, if you will unfasten my arms and allow me, I will show you the secret door," said Dan.

"He only says that to get his arms released, and then he will break away," said the landlord.

"I assure you I will not," Dan answered.

His arms were released. Dan had marked well the spot where the door had opened, and going to the right side, he saw a slight raise under the wall paper which he knew to be the button to the secret spring. He pressed on this, and behold, the door flew open, revealing the secret passage. Before a word could be said, a voice below could be heard, saying:

"Got him 'rested fur murder! Who says he did it? Show 'em ter me, an' yer kin chaw me up fur bufler meat ef I don't knock th' socks off'n 'em!"

Next moment the door burst open, and Grizzly Jake entered.

"There is my witness," said Ddy Dan. Everybody stood dumb with amazement. Others were crowding into the room attracted by the noise. Among them came Annie Dix and Harris.

Old Grizzly Jake gazed on the girl a moment and gave a leap and a yell. What was the matter everybody asked.

"Ther gal—ther gal! Wot's yename?" he called out.

"Nannie Nix, from Alton, Illine."

"Whoop—hooray! I knowed it."

Then old Grizzly Jake seized the girl in his arms and began to hug and kiss her all over the face.

"What does this mean?" Harris demanded.

"Stop that."

"Looker hyar, pilgrim, I've gt er nateral right ter hug that air gal ez muh ez I want ter. She's my own gal."

"Who are you?"

"Jake Nix, from Alton, Eelypis."

"My father!" cried Nannie, and it now became her turn to embrace old Grizzly Jake, laughing and crying at the same time he turned to Harris and said:

"Say, pilgrim, this air my picnic, an' yer not in it."

CHAPTER XI.

SALTING THE MINE.

For a few moments everybody was too much dumfounded to utter a word. Then Nannie Nix, the beautiful actress, explained that her chief object in coming West had been to find her father, and that she had found him. He had been gone a great many years, and she and her mother had not heard of him. Everybody had known the old man as Grizzly Jake, and no one suspected that he was the father of the great favorite actress.

Old Grizzly Jake, in we shall still call him, told how he had rescued Dandy Dan of Deadwood, and shot the man who was about to hang him.

The guilty landlord and several of his chums tried to make it appear that Jake as well as Dan was a confederate of the roa agents, but it would not win. Jake was Nannie's father and Nannie Nix instead of Dix, her stage name, was a great favorite. The father of the favorite could not be guilty, nor could Dandy Dan, because the father of the favorite said he was not guilty.

Then the landlord became alarmed. It was decided to release Dan and investigate the matter. This was a compromise and when Dan was released old Grizzly Jake came to him and said:

"Say, pilgrim, yer want ter keep yer eyes peeled. Them fellers hev got it in fur yer an' no mistake now. They're goin' ter stick er big knife in yer, sure."

Dan said he would be on the watch. Some advised him to leave town but he smiled and said nothing.

That day he met the Chinaman in the gulch.

"Where have you been, Lee?" he asked.

"Me watchee mill."

"Has it been salted?"

"No."

"Well, do you keep your eyes open all night?"

"Bettee life."

"To-morrow is the clean-up day."

"Yesee."

"If it is salted at all it will be done to-night."

"Bettee life."

The Chinaman went away, and as Dan watched him retire, he said to himself:

"I ought to go to the ruin again or somewhere and hunt for Miss Lucas and Mr. Tuttle; but as this is the last night they will have to do their work at the mine, I am going to watch it myself; not that I lack confidence in the Chinaman, but they may be too sharp for him."

As soon as it was quite dark, Dandy Dan of Deadwood crept down the valley to the mine.

He crawled along one of the ditches to a sluice box, and then reached the great of like basin in which was the pounded groet stone and earth to be washed and the gn cleared out of it next day.

Creeping noiselessly as a shadow aro among the ponderous machinery, he crept by a great water tank and lay on a bo which was along its side. He was now ab the mud to be cleaned, and in a dark pl where he could watch it.

"Where is the Chinaman?" he asked himself. "I see him nowhere."

He lay there a long time, listening, watchi and waiting. At last he heard footsteps a proaching.

"Whist!" said a voice. Then a shad glided forward. It was a man, and he he something in his hand.

"Bring on the lantern!" he commanded.

Another person came from amid the m chinery with a lantern and Dandy Dan of Dea wood started so violently he almost fell fro the board on which he was stretched at f length. The second person was Lee Sing, the Chinaman.

Dandy Dan of Deadwood had been betrayed by the very man he had in his employ. The other man was Dobson who carried three or four buckskin bags in his hands.

"I borrowed this," he said, untying the strings. "It's precious salt but it will bring up the price of stocks on our mine enormously. Then he sprinkled the gold dust and nuggets all over the mud in the bin, and taking a hoe he stirred it in well, taking great care to clean off the blade of the hoe.

"Now we are ready for the clearing up, eh, Lee?"

"Bettee life."

"So Dandy Dan of Deadwood, employed you to watch and see if the mine was salted?"

"Bettee life."

"Well, you will report it is not."

"Bettee life."

"You have betrayed him right nicely, Sing, and you shall have the two thousand lars I promised."

"Alle lite."

"Now I want you to set out to the old ruin. You know where they are?"

"Bettee life."

"Go there and meet Black Gabriel of Vultures. He will be waiting for you. He will tell him to release Mr. Lucas at dayl and De Ve but to hold the other prisoners, the girl victs. Mr. Tuttle. We can make it appear they elope."

"Bettee life."

"Now you understand it all?"

"Bettee life."

"Go."

The Chinaman hurried away into the darkness, and Mr. Dobson now went away also.

Dan's plan was formed. He rolled from his perch, alighting on his feet, and set out at run for the village. It was not very late, and on gaining the hotel, he found Grizzly Jake talking with his new found daughter, and his future son-in-law, Harris.

Dan called them out and hurriedly explained what he wanted.

"There is not a moment to lose. We must act at once or it will be too late. Come with me, and, Harris, you ought to know three or four men whom you can trust."

"I do."

"Are they in town?"

"In this house."

"Brave?"

"Yes."

"Have them get their pistols and come on."

Dan acted so rapidly that in a few moments he had six armed men following him, and was on the trail of the Chinaman before he reached the ruins. They found the Chinaman and Black Gabriel, the road agent talking, and did not molest them.

Then they followed the two to a cavern a mile away. They entered the cavern, and Dandy Dan and his brave men followed them. They came in sight of a large subterranean chamber in which sat Mr. Lucas, tied, with four or five bandits, all masked, guarding him.

"Are you ready?" Dan asked of his men. "No, sarge!" they yelled and dashed on the astounded Dan.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

The outlaws were so completely taken by surprise that they had not time to draw a gun before Dandy Dan of Deadwood and his men were on them. "Surrender—surrender!" cried Dan, as with a revolver in each hand, he went in the face of the others. "Don't resist or you'll be lynched!" "Hands up!" "Yes," said Black Gabriel, "we are gone." "Yes, you are caught." "We know it." "Do you surrender?" "Will you spare our lives?" "You shall have a fair trial according to the law."

"Don't we be lynched?"

"No."

"Then we surrender."

See Sing being confronted by his master, he yelled and made a dash for the opening in the cavern.

"You infernal traitor, take your reward!" Dan, firing a shot after him as he ran.

The Chinaman did not utter a cry nor even a word. He threw up his hands and fell forward on his face, and never moved. He was then picked up. Dan then secured his weapons and released Mr. Lucas.

"How came you here?" he asked. "I caught you in California, Mr. Lucas?"

"I was captured a week ago," said the captain, "and brought here."

"Where you? Where is your daughter?"

"Home in St. Louis."

"No!"

"What do you mean?" cried the father.

"Dan then told him how he had found

his daughter there and why she had come, and of the strange disappearance of Mr. Tuttle and the girl.

He then made Black Gabriel show the way to an inner chamber, where the girl and Tuttle were both found. Alice Lucas had for a companion a woman whose face Dan recognized as the woman's face he had seen at the attic window, also Old Moll the witch of the ruin.

The woman with the white face was the wife of the outlaw, Old Moll, his mother. She had acted as an assistant for bandits for years.

"It was I who warned you to leave, Dandy Dan," said the outlaw's wife. "I knew the Chinaman had betrayed you and that the Vultures of Montana would kill you, so I warned you to leave the country. It was I who secured your weapons and dropped them from a tree while I hid in the hollow trunk. It was I who assumed the ghost and gazed out of the window through a flame of sulphur to frighten you away. There are secret doors at the old ruin which connect with this cavern, but you did not find them."

Everything which had been so mysterious was now explained to Dan.

He demanded Norris Tuttle, and was led to the place where he was guarded by two more of the Vultures.

They fired their pistols at Dan and tried to escape, but at three bounds Grizzly Jake was on them, seized each by the shoulder, and hurling them to the ground, yelled:

"Hold on thar! D'yer want me ter knock ther socks clean off'n ye? Think ter git er-way, did yer! Must think I'm green—don't know who I am. Think I can't bound myself 'cordin' ter ther geography. Why yer infernal ignoramoses, I've traveled over an' erround ther whole sarcumnavigable globe, from ther Isthmus of Gibraltar ter ther rock o' Darien. I've been roasted erlive in ther North Pole, froze ter death in ther South Pole, swam the Red Sea till I war red, the Black Sea till I war er nigger, and ther White till I got my nateral color. I upset the Egyptian Sphynx

and run er race wi' ther Roman chariots, an' never in all my time did I let er pair of sich ouery skunks ez you git away with me."

The two prisoners were trembling and checked by the old man's fingers at their throats until they were almost black.

Dan came to them, tied them with the others, and with the whole party set out for Paradise, which was reached at dawn of day.

Just as Mr. Dobson awoke and gazed out from his window, the sun rose. Mr. Dobson smiled. To-day would witness a clean up of the salted mine, his stocks would all sell, and he would leave for Europe.

There came a knock at his door and the sheriff entered. He arrested Mr. Dobson.

"On what charge?"

"For fraud. For salting your mine to sell shares, and for conspiring with one Gabriel Le Noir, a noted bandit, to imprison certain parties. Black Gabriel and his entire band are prisoners. He has confessed."

Mr. Dobson said he felt weak, and asked to go to his dresser and take a drink of whisky. The sheriff consented. He did not see him put a white powder in the glass, but ten seconds later Mr. Dobson was dead. He had taken strychnine.

We have not much more to relate. Black Gabriel and his men are all in the penitentiary yet, and will remain there many years to come. Harris and Nannie were married, and both are still on the stage. Old Grizzly Jake is still on the frontier, though he declares he will go home some time. Mr. Lucas and his daughter went home. Mr. Tuttle followed them, and he and Alice were married.

Paradise Valley is a ruin to-day. The Song Bird Mines were a failure; a fraud organized by Mr. John Dobson, and supported by the Vultures who were to share his profits, but the whole fraud was exposed, as we have seen, by that noted detective, Dandy Dan of Deadwood.

[THE END.]

FRANK TOUSEY, the author of this story, is also the author of the following stories published in the WIDE AWAKE LITERATURE: No. 1096, "Frank Reade, Jr. and His Electric Coach; or, The Search for the Isle of Diamonds"—Part II. No. 1095, "Frank Reade, Jr. and His Electric Coach; or, The Search for the Isle of Diamonds"—Part I. No. 1089, "Dandy Dan of Deadwood and His Great Divide." No. 1083, "From Pole to Pole; or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Strange Line Voyage." No. 1077, "Dandy Dan of Deadwood and His Big Bonanza."

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